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Oral history interview with Ursula von
Rydingsvard, 2011 November 16-17

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Ursula von Rydingsvard on November 16, 2011. The interview took place in Brooklyn, New York, and was conducted by Judith Richards for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America.

Ursula von Rydingsvard has reviewed the transcript. Her corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Ursula von Rydingsvard on November 16, 2011, in her studio in Brooklyn [NY], for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc one.

Good morning.

URSULA VON RYDINGSVARD: Good morning.

MS. RICHARDS: I want to start by asking you about your family history, as far back as you'd like to go, but especially those people who you knew. You could start with your grandparents, if you want to, and then continue to your parents and your siblings, and exactly when and where you were born, and all those details.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I've never seen my grandparents. I never knew my grandparents. They somehow got lost in the shuffle during World War II—that is, the grandparents on my mother's side. My father's side came out of something that was—up to the age of nine, he actually lived on a sizable farm, with a father who played a clarinet and hunted.

But after [his] father died—and I cannot remember of what, and I don't know if they really knew of what he died; my father was nine—he and his sister and his brother were sent out to become something akin to slaves of other farmers, in that they were treated very, very differently, even though these people [were friends of -UvR] my father's father.

My father's life was very different, in the sense that he was at the mercy of whatever family he was staying with, so that he would live in the barns with the animals [throughout the year, including winters -UvR].

The Ukrainian winters were quite brutal. They [fed him dried bread and -UvR] used to lend him an overcoat. And when he went on to another family, they would take that away from him. It was a degree of cruelty that makes me [shudder, especially in that it happened to a young boy -UvR].

In time, he got to be a woodsman, in the sense that he would work in the forests and cut down trees. And he also got to be a driver for a cart for the farmer that owned the land, by the time that he was 21. And he met my mother when he was 21.

MS. RICHARDS: Did he talk about those experiences, and you understood how difficult and scarring they had been?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, it's much more scarring than [I have described -UvR]. I just cry, because he watched his mother die [of starvation -UvR] under a tree, with flies flying around her. He went through extreme measures to try to save her, but it was really impossible, because he was so young and he was so controlled [with intense labor expectations -UvR] by the people with whom he lived.

He also watched his two youngest siblings die of starvation. They were born after he left. [His] mother—who was adopted from an orphanage by parents who were incredibly kind to her; they loved her enormously—was a woman who was very naïve, very trusting, very beautiful, and a younger man came to marry her [after her husband died].

So she immediately did that, and he proceeded to just completely be negligent of the farm that my father came out of. The barn caught fire; the animals were basically destroyed. It was just a derelict human being that caused tremendous havoc to what was left of the family that my father [had to leave to survive -UvR].

MS. RICHARDS: This was his stepfather?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It was his stepfather, but he never played the role of a stepfather because my father was out of the house, as was his younger sister and as was his younger brother. So it was just—they were just tragedies that numb me out.

There was also an incident of this man who married my father's mother, of a friend who ended up murdering one of my father's sisters, married the second sister, and ended up also murdering her. So there were incidences that pointed to an inhumanity that just feels difficult to talk about—

MS. RICHARDS: Where did this—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —because it's so unspeakable.

MS. RICHARDS: Where did this—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It all happened in the Ukraine. It's near Lviv.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell Lviv?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: L-V-I-V. [... -UvR] I can get the town, the exact town [Stryj -UvR], because I visited it.

MS. RICHARDS: And tell me the name of your father and mother, for the record.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: My father is Ignacy—I-G-N-A-C-Y. And in Ukrainian it was Kuryliszyn [Kunegunda].

After he met my mother, he spoke Polish. Polish is fairly closely related to the Ukrainian language, and [my father's -UvR] name changed to Karoliszyn, which was more of a Polish name. That's the name that I was born with, and it's the name that I used up until my first marriage. So that's spelled K-A-R-O-L-I-S-Z-Y-N.

MS. RICHARDS: So you mentioned your father and mother meeting. Your mother came from a less harsh background, I hope.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: My mother came from a real family, but, again, World War I caused the death of her father, whom she loved. And when a stepfather came in, their lives changed pretty significantly.

The stepfather had a German background. His last name was Sternal—S-T-E-R-N-A-L. And in looking at the cemeteries in the part of Poland where my mother came from, which is in the southeastern portion, there were many, many such last names, so there must have been a whole group of them that migrated to that part of Poland from Germany.

That stepfather seemed not to be a sensitive father at all, and I think he was extremely frustrating to my mother's mother. My mother's mother was quite a smart woman. Her maiden name was [Rozalia] Czarnecka—C-Z-A-R-N-E-C-K—C-K-A, Czarnecka.

And, oddly enough, it's got the word "*czarna*" in it, which means "black." It doesn't mean anything, except that obviously I wear nothing but black, and I blacken my works a lot.

She was a smart woman in the sense that they moved from Poland to the Ukraine—and I think they moved in about 1926, but I can get you the exact year—to land that was much more fertile. And by selling the land in Poland, she was able to get enough money to buy much more land in the Ukraine.

Of course, the Ukrainians really disliked the Poles, because they—[... -UvR] to many of the Ukrainians, they seemed rich because of [... the amount of -UvR] land that they [the Poles] were able to get from the start, and so the relationship between the Ukrainians and the Poles was not a very good one. My mother speaks of having stones thrown [at] her.

But I think, generally speaking, my mother had a mother who was very strong, very courageous [and made all the important decisions - UvR]. In fact, unusually strong for women in those years. She expected a lot from the women in her family and the female children in her family.

My mother was sent away—and this is something she remembers in a way that makes her extremely sad and lonely—[her parents, Józef Sternal -UvR] sent her away to a farm that she says was far away [from the farm where her family lived -UvR]. But I visited that farm, and I guess it was only two miles, but for a child it was far. So from the time that she was nine years old, they would send her for an entire summer to a barn, basically, where she lived. And [she had to find her own food—mostly potatoes -UvR].

MS. RICHARDS: Why?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Because he, the stepfather, would not do it. He would not go there and live away from his wife or from his family or from his real home, where he got real meals and all of that.

So she had to kind of fend for herself during the summers, and she looks on those times as that of her being abandoned, and as times that she felt prematurely and artificially ripped away from her family.

But she still ended up being a mother that was extremely nurturing, and a mother that went through nine post—World War II refugee camps for Polish people in a way that was akin to a mother courage, in the sense of what she would have to do in order to keep her seven children alive. She performed feats that truly took a tremendous amount of effort and a tremendous amount of love for her children.

We, in turn, idolized her and adored her; she was our totally beloved mother, as opposed to my father, who was very much feared, because of the fits, the temper—mental fits that he'd have that sometimes would be involved with violence toward the children and toward my mother. And I suppose this all has to do with his upbringing. He was also very paranoid.

He was a man who had very little confidence in who he was and what he had a right to. So throughout his life, including that in the United States, he had the lowest—he worked for Stanley Works for 35 years—he had the lowest-paying job right up until the [... end -UvR].

They had to give him raises—very menial raises, what absolutely the law [demanded -UvR]—in keeping with what Stanley Works did. After you worked so many years, you got this much of a raise. But he continued to have one of the worst machines—he was a factory worker—that Stanley Works had.

I think he wouldn't have the courage to ask for another machine, even though he missed only one day in the 35 years of his employment—one day—and that was not because he was sick, but I don't know if I should—I won't go into that story. So he was a kind of slave for Stanley Works.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back to—I don't think I asked you your mother's name.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: My mother's name is Kunegunda—K-U-N-E-G-U-N-D-A.

MS. RICHARDS: That was her first name?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That was her first name. And Sternal was her last name—her maiden name—S-T-E-R-N-A-L.

MS. RICHARDS: I think I read you were one of seven children. You just mentioned that. The fifth—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: —of seven.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Maybe you could briefly describe the early years before your family came to the U.S., to Connecticut—in Europe.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: During the camps, that's what I had, the family.

MS. RICHARDS: So you got to the camps when the war ended.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I was born in 1942. So the war ended in 1945. I can describe briefly where we were 1942 to '45. That was in a town called Deensen—D-E-E-N-S-E-N—

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, that's where you were born.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —in Germany. This was a place where my father worked for the bürgermeister, who was the landowner that owned a huge amount of land in the little village called Deensen.

I think it was about the year 1940, my father was conscripted by the Germans, because they needed somebody to farm their land, as many of their males were fighting in the war. And he was a spectacular farmer. He was a tremendously hard worker. I feel to this day the relationship that he must have had to his land. I feel to this day how he must have watched the plow [cutting -UvR] through the soil, turning it over as it made its rows to plant into.

It's not as though he was in love with these things, and it's not as though he evaluated them from an aesthetic

point. It's as though it were a necessity in life that had to be performed in order for him to live and in order for his family to live—that it was a necessity that was close to nature. But that never occurred to him, I'm sure, until he came to the United States and was completely ripped away from it, working in a factory that smelled horrible, that had [harsh -UvR] noises [... from -UvR] the machines as they did what they had to do.

My father's [wrists were chained to his -UvR] first machine, that he stayed on for quite some time [... -UvR]. He would set up a die, and then his wrists would be [pulled -UvR] up with a chain, so that when the die descended on it, his hands wouldn't [be smashed -UvR].

[... My father spent many, many -UvR] hours of having to bear this. It must have seemed to him very, very, very different from the place he came from, where he was able to look up from the land that he tilled and see the birds. I know how much he enjoyed that because I would see him doing that after he came to the United States.

He [my father] did not allow himself many pleasures. I could see that our backyard, which was very humble, very modest—wasn't much [to look at -UvR]. I think we didn't have more than a half an acre at the most. But he built something that he called a barn, which was actually built of cinder blocks.

Everything was done in the cheapest possible way, but he called it a barn, inside of which he hung something like 55 shovels. And these shovels were [beat up and humble -UvR]—one was cheaper than the next. They were not shovels that were worthy of being hung. But he hung them, sometimes with their heads up, sometimes with their heads down, so that they covered a huge area of what was actually a garage, because you couldn't just have a barn without putting anything in it. But he called it his barn.

MS. RICHARDS: Did he find those shovels?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I guess he bought them. He abused them. They were shovels that were—all of his tools were abused tools. There was nothing he had, it seemed, that was normal and functional, including his lawn mower.

So these shovels were just cheap things that he bought at hardware stores, at tag sales, but they were shovels that he used for shoveling the snow. We had a garden on the side of our home, so it was a substantial garden. He prepared the soil for planting with the shovels.

But the shovels he must have used in a way that was much more serious, and much more a part of his life in the Ukraine, where he had his piece of land that he worked [before World War II -UvR]. And he was working on getting another piece of land. It was obvious that he was going to be a farmer's success story, as one could be in the Ukraine, when the war broke out.

The shovels he had in the barn—what he called a barn, in the garage—were a very anemic version, nevertheless a plentiful version of an instrument that he had that was extremely pivotal to him.

The other instrument that he used when he was in Deensen—that's the town in which I was born—a lot is the scythe. And I have two scythes to my name. I have one in my upstate studio, and I have one that hangs here. [The scythe and the plow were the tools that my father used most frequently. -UvR] The scythe is a beautiful thing; it has a very special curve and a handle that you can grab that really works with your body, and is informed about the swing that a body can make when it harvests wheat or rye or [clover and hay -UvR]—

So the first day that he came to work for the [bürgermeister -UvR] in Deensen, he worked so hard, [in part -UvR] because he was so scared—and this is before the family came to join him—that the burgomaster said to him, "Ignacy," he said, "you have done more than seven men could in one day."

So the bürgermeister realized in not too long how valuable a man he was. My father then had the nerve—and he asks for very little, very few times—he had the nerve to ask the burgomaster, "I want you to find out where my wife is, and my children, and I want you to get them over here," which he did, and they joined him.

I'm not quite sure what the time span is of his having been alone. Maybe it was [... fourteen months -UvR]. They joined him—actually it was less than that, because my mother was pregnant with my older brother. [This was an infernal trip for mother and her young, sick three children with the oldest being seven and the youngest ones were Henry and Johnny—this happened in Heriden, Germany, where the traumatic birth of Johnny occurred. -UvR]

So she joined him, having given premature birth after a tremendously difficult trip going from the Ukraine through Poland and through Germany, in trains that other people were being transported in, one of which caught fire.

[During this trip to Deensen, -UvR] her two children got ill. They both got pneumonia, and she had to nurse them

to health in a hospital. The hospital kept saying, "Just leave your child here and we'll take care of it." And of course, she knew better, because all of the children [that were left there—the mothers were just sent the clothing of the dead children -UvR], and that was [a time when the Germans were having great difficulty -UvR]—there was nobody to take care of the child.

So my mother had three children at the time, all three of whom got ill, but she nursed them in a way that [kept them alive -UvR] So my mother had a [...circuitous -UvR] trip from the Ukraine through Poland into Germany on the train that were extremely traumatic. She stayed in places—huge warehouses, that had hay [... on the floor to sleep on -UvR]—of people that were also being transported with, obviously, not very much food or adequate clothing.

She traveled with three—in Polish we call them *piierzyna*. They're feather beds. And she traveled with pots and pans. In other words, she traveled with things that were absolutely essential to her survival. But as one could imagine, it's still stuff that needed to be carried.

And she traveled with a child who was a year and a half old, and another child that was three and a half years old, and another child that was five and a half years old—and pregnant. So this trip was, I think—well, I know—probably the most difficult thing that she had been through. But she definitely had to get to my father because it would have been very difficult for her to survive otherwise.

Anyway, she arrived in something like 1940, [having given] birth to my brother, [by then] five months old. I don't know how he survived. He was premature [with a black and blue body from all the lifting my mother had to do -UvR], obviously. But when she had come to this farm, she had been asked by the *bürgermeister* to also join all of the workers.

My mother had much more courage than my father. She said, "I cannot." She said, "Look at the children I have. I need to care for them," which she did. And because they were living on a farm, they actually had enough to eat.

That farm [in Deensen] was something that my older sister and my older brother have very fond memories of—of how they played, the little pools, the ponds that they had to swim in. So for the children it was—and for the whole family—it was a good thing, and my father was obviously extremely happy to have his family there.

Nineteen forty-five, the war ended, and the moment the war ended, the *bürgermeister* begged my father to stay on. At that time we had six children, and my father said, "My children can do nothing but what I'm doing"—that is, working on a farm for someone else—"if I stay here." And he decided that he would make an effort to come to the United States, because glorious stories were heard of the United States.

When we arrived [at] the first camp, we saw some American soldiers who had fought the war, toward the end of the war, against the Germans. In fact, many of the barracks that we lived in were barracks that the American soldiers had built.

MS. RICHARDS: This was in Germany?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: This was in Germany; that's right. And Deensen is near a place named Hanover. I can give you the names of all of the camps that we went to and the times, the years. But we made our way north through Germany, until 1950. We went through about nine different camps.

[The entire family went through these D.P. Camps: Jahnschule D.P. Camp in Holzminden, June 1945–January 1946; Karlschule D.P. Camp also in Holzmididen, January 1945–January 1946; Bevern Castle D.P. Camp, January 1947–June 1947; Czternastka, 14, Saltzgitter, June 1947–October 1947; D.P. Camp Obóz Immendorf-Saltzgitter, October 1947–May 1950; Seedorf D.P. Camp, May 1950–September 1950; Wentorf D.P. Camp, close to Hamburg, September 1950–November 1950, where we vetted; Bremerhaven, November 1950–December 1950, the port from which we departed; New York, USA, December 12–December 22, 1950. -UvR]

But let me just finish that. We left from Bremerhaven, which was a port city in the northern part of Germany, where we left on a military ship [named *General Bradford* -UvR], to come to the United States. This was the end of 1950—I'd say November, maybe even October, 1950. [... -UvR]

[Audio break.]

So, in 1945 we were put in a camp for displaced Polish people. I think the Marshall Plan had a lot to do with this, to which I am eternally grateful, because they provided the food—it was actually a system that worked [... -UvR]. That food was disseminated to people like us who had no country.

We couldn't go back to Poland because Poland was taken over by the communists. And this was something that we fought against or did not want. So the camps [we lived in -UvR] were obviously the places that were left over

from the war. Some of them were concentration camps. Some of them were just places [barracks] where the American soldiers would live. And some of them were schoolhouses that were no longer used, that had schoolrooms in it that we would occupy as a family. We would take a schoolroom.

MS. RICHARDS: That sounds like a better situation than a barracks, when you went to a schoolroom.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Actually, the best situation was the barrack. The barrack—except the first one, which was a concentration camp, which one could feel—I wasn't really old enough to be able to feel this, but you could see the watchtowers from which all of the barracks would be checked out.

You could feel—and as a child in these camps, the stories that would still be in the air would be ones of what happened—what was happening in the concentration camps. They were things that you could not run away from. Children would tell you. It wasn't even adults.

There were no newspapers. There was no television. You would just feel it. You would know it. You would know these unspeakable things happened. And you would actually feel very grateful that it didn't happen to you, but you would feel so guilty that it didn't happen to you. Even as a child you would feel the guilt.

Now, I know that all of this sounds pretty grim, but actually there's something about having lived in a barrack—and I think one of them we lived for about two or three years—in which I know that there was something about sleeping against the wood, having that familiarity with wooden planks. The floors were wooden. The roof was wooden. The stairs going up to this barrack were wooden, because the barracks were usually on posts, so that they wouldn't absorb—they would be free of [rats and -UvR] having rain soak into it.

And, a child, those are things that are very insistent. I feel like my family was my entire world, that those were the only people that I could afford to have any kind of closeness to. And with my sisters, I was extremely close to them.

My mother was our guardian, the one that would make sure that things worked out. At least that's how I felt as a child. And I remember periodically sleeping with her, against her [large -UvR] back, and I felt like it was the place in which I could get heavenly peace and glorious safety.

And, actually, in the barracks, even though it was clear that the Germans didn't like us, there was a kind of community that we always kept a distance from. There were other Polish people, and periodically in these camps there were schools that were set up, and these schools were taught by teachers that taught in Poland. Some of them were actually fairly decently organized. And they were schools that were unbelievably strict, but you just expected it. This is how it was.

You were actually given something akin to a thin, thin notebook that had lines on it for writing. Everybody was given one of those. And you would cherish it immensely. And you were given one pencil, which you would also take incredible care of. When you would practice [writing -UvR], you wouldn't make a mistake.

There were no erasers, so you would wet the tip of your finger and you would rub it against the paper in order to erase, but you would do it so gently so you wouldn't go through the paper. But one could also draw pictures on the earth [as paper was so scarce. -UvR] There was really no grass to speak of. That is, all of the pathways were just more—stomping of feet on top of whatever was growing there.

But one of the more interesting things is I played in a building that was made out of bricks that was destroyed, that was bombed, and there were just partial walls that were standing. But I was able to take many of the bricks that were free, in the sense that they weren't bound to anything, and sort of work in that environment the way I needed to work.

It felt like the most amazing playground. I never thought of it as a playground, but it felt like there was infinite complexities of what I could do with the layers and with the [mountains of loose and broken bricks -UvR]. And then I would actually play in these little grottos that I would make for myself, that they would become something that would better suit a fantasy than just the room in itself. I was able to mold an environment that gave me so much pleasure to play in.

I also remember having ice cream. There was a man that came around—and it wasn't very frequent, but he came around in the summers. And I think it was on some sort of a paper that he would scoop out the ice cream. The ice cream was not hard like ours; it was relatively soft. So between the five of us, we were licking like little piggies [the same little pile of ice cream on the paper -UvR], and it [... tasted divine -UvR].

I remember, too, in one of the camps, my mother making pancakes. It was an understood rule that we would never, ever share our food, because it was so [sparse -UvR]. It was so minimal, everybody had to take care that everybody in [their own family had food ... -UvR].

But I remember going outside and having a roll, a pancake roll, and children gathered around me wanting that. [Though I remember thinking that they might be so friendly because they liked me. -UvR] And I remember sort of giving it out, and my mother would say, "Are you eating something? You're not giving it out, are you?" But I would still give out as much as I thought was reasonable, so it wouldn't become completely, outrageously obvious.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were talking about creating these play enclosures and using the bricks, it sounds so much like playing with blocks and building things as a child here might. And, of course, then it connects to being a sculptor, ultimately.

When you were doing that—let's see, you were born in 1942 and you left in '50, so you were up to eight years old—did you have a sense that you had some special talent, or that other children would notice that you were especially good at this, or that your parents—I don't know if they had time or even saw these little places where you played—if there was a recognition, because I presume [you] had no materials to do other kinds of artwork, if you had wanted to.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, we didn't have very many materials. I remember my older brother having gotten ahold of some paper from which he was able to make a [very small -UvR] manger for Christmas, which I thought was just astonishing and beautiful. He was able to make these little figures—just silhouettes of figures that he was able to cut out.

But we had things like burnt wood. Not that I used the burnt wood for anything. I never knew there was such a thing as making art. And the only icons I ever saw were Christ on the [cross -UvR]—in the church. And the church was just like a larger barrack that had something that felt more precious than what any other barrack had. [... -UvR]

Even the garbs of the priests—the gold shiny rings and so on—seemed amazing. Or the Eucharist, when it was raised, and all of those gold rays that came out of it. All of it totally seemed like of another world, or from another place.

I remember somebody having gotten a ram that was made out of white plaster for Easter, which was a huge deal for the family. I remember I kept looking at it. And the plaster, of course, was cheap and really [... soft -UvR], and somehow the head of the ram, while I was handling it, just came off. And I actually wanted to die. I actually—not because this ram was so beautiful, but because I had done such a [horrible -UvR] thing.

It's not as though I was forcing it in any way. And it didn't fall, it just came off. So obviously it was not a very high-end plaster. And I'm not quite sure how that ended, in terms of whether I was—how I was punished for it.

But in terms of anybody seeing or noticing it, my parents wouldn't see or notice a whole lot, because their whole focus was on survival. And there was no knowledge of art, really, and there was no knowledge on my part.

And I can't say I felt special. I think the only one that might have made me feel special was my older sister. But nobody really made me feel special. It was about eating, and it was about clothing you in a way so that you wouldn't get sick.

MS. RICHARDS: What are the names of your brothers and sisters?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: My oldest brother is Eugene, then Henry, then John. No, I'm sorry, Eugene, Jessica, Henry, John, me, my sister Christine, and my younger brother Stanley.

MS. RICHARDS: Was Stanley born in Germany?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, he was born in Germany. He was born in one of the camps.

MS. RICHARDS: And you were two? No, that was before—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: In fact, we were supposed to go to Australia, and the birth of my younger brother saved us from that, and enabled us to go through more camps so that we could get to the United States.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you know how it was that you actually were able to go to the U.S., and why it was that you got to Connecticut?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I know that, when I was in the camps, there was the UNRA, United Nations Relief Association, or the relief fund, and that there was UNESCO, United Nations—wait a minute, UNRA and National Catholic World [Relief -UvR] Organization.

They were actually our sponsor. And I suppose it [was] because we had seven children, that they would gain

nine more Catholics. But they were our sponsor. And of course, after we came to the United States, it's not as though they did anything, but they did sponsor us, because there was nobody else in the United States that we knew.

I think the Marshall Plan was primarily a plan that enabled us displaced people to be fed. How it is that they worried about displaced people when, after the war, the United States didn't have it so easy either—how it is that they worried about us is really, really, really to this country's credit. And I'm not a patriot, believe me, but it's very moving. Whether or not we would have been alive today, I don't know, without that.

There was also the Red Cross that did a wonderful thing that I remember: giving us one of those big Nestle bars, chocolate Nestle bars. We would look at it for days, and we would feel the paper on it, and we would—and of course—then there came a time—and I think we usually waited until Christmas, and we would divvy that up and enjoy it enormously.

So your question was—

MS. RICHARDS: And then why Connecticut—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Why Connecticut?

MS. RICHARDS: —and the town in Connecticut where you went? And, just for the record, why don't you say your actual birth date?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I was born July 26, 1942, in Deensen, Germany—D-E-E-N-S-E-N, Germany.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were over eight in late 1950 when you came by ship—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes—

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: —to the Port of New York?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —steel ship called *USS General R. M. Blatchford* to the Port of New York, that's correct. But it wasn't Ellis Island; it was one of the warehouses that stands on the Hudson River. And we were met there —

MS. RICHARDS: You mean one of the piers in Midtown, where it would be—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: One of the piers, not in Midtown. I think it was further south because they had—

MS. RICHARDS: Around 14th Street, yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Fourteenth Street, right.

An organization called the National Polish Alliance met us at the boat. And as soon as my father got off the boat, they sold him a 20-year life insurance policy for him, for my mother, and for the seven children—a 20-year life insurance policy. But they were so good to us. They took us with the car—

MS. RICHARDS: Were you all speaking Polish? That was your language, yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, we all spoke Polish, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't start speaking German, because you were in Germany for five years.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, because we never associated with the Germans.

MS. RICHARDS: So they took you in a car, as you were saying.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: We were taken in a car, and my sister and I—they had to keep stopping the car because we'd get so carsick. We'd never ridden in a car before. [In the campus, -UvR] we rode in something that were like military trucks, that were much more open. And it would usually be at night, when you couldn't even see the road going by. And that was so rare. That was maybe, like, [... nine -UvR] times that that happened.

So they took us to Oak Ridge, New Jersey, where there was a home that belonged to the Polish National Alliance [an insurance company]. It was a three-story white clapboard house that was so organized. There was a dining room, and everybody had a chair, like they were prepared for our coming.

There were bedrooms—it wasn't like a lineup of beds that we had in the barracks, and they were all military beds that we had. There were these springs, and these metal headboards. So this was—these were real beds with mattresses, with blankets.

And clean—it was all clean. There were rugs on the floor. I don't know when we saw rugs on the floor. It was like coming into—we thought the United States was great, but we couldn't imagine how great. We couldn't imagine the luxury of it.

So our first meal there, they served us Polish food, because it was a Polish cook, which, of course, is the food that we loved. That's what we know. And they gave us bowls of borscht. That was the beet soup with real sour cream in the middle.

And so we ate that, and we ate so much bread with it, because there was also bread. And then they gave us another course that was like the entrée. We couldn't believe how plentiful, and that you had this variety—because the food we had in the camps were—you ate potatoes for supper. Well, you had potatoes for lunch and maybe had fried potatoes for supper. And then the next day—rarely did we have meat, but most of the time it was bread with schmaltz. It was the fat of a pig with a little bit of salt on it.

Their bread was fantastic in the camps. I'm still trying to find bread that good here in the United States. It had hard-crust bread that was really wheaty. It was a loaf that was made big, so you had to hold it against your chest in order to cut it. And it was moist, but, of course, it had to last us for a week, because I think we could only get replenished once every week, once every seven days. So my mother would have a chest full of dried bread that we would crunch on, we would eat all the time. [We were so used to eating all the food put in front of us in the camps that when we arrived to that inn in Oak Ridge we also slurped up a large bottle of ketchup. - UvR]

But to see this variety, to have it in front of you, to have real dishes, to have—because often we just ate out of a central pot; each of us had a spoon and each of us had a fork. And in the camps I used to walk around with this spoon tied around my neck, and the spoon had a hole in it and it had "U.S." on it—that's the United States. It was a military spoon. And here they had silver that was put out for you, to the right and to the left, that would chime.

We were in awe, in that the table had a tablecloth on it, and everybody had their own glasses. It was just—it just —

MS. RICHARDS: Would this have been something even your parents had ever seen?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, I don't think they had ever seen it. However, their whole life was not spent in the camps. Just living in Poland they might have seen other homes that had things in it that were civilized. Or in the Ukraine, having lived there, they might have seen it.

We didn't, because in the farms—where we lived in the farm in Deensen, it was all very primitive; basically, what my mother was able to bring with her, which wasn't very much, and whatever little we were able to get in terms of utensils; so it was pretty depleted.

So the other thing with Oak Ridge is that they had a bar that was right next to the home. And I can't help but think that this home might have been used as a little resort, or—it wasn't a fancy resort, but a place that people could get away to the country, and that there was a bar next to it so that they could go and have some kind of entertainment in the bar, because one could play cards.

They had kind of a shuffle game that you could play, with these round, flat things [steel pucks] that you could sort of propel. I'm not quite sure how it all worked—we didn't really care—but they actually allowed us to play with these things. They allowed us to go into a bar. It's the first time we ever tasted soda, and we couldn't believe how painful it was because of what the bubbles did to your throat and to the top of your mouth.

But also it's the first time we saw television. I remember the Campbell's Soup commercials, and I remember the cigarette, Chesterfield, and the Chesterfield lady with these short shorts. So it was all a huge blast. It was like this total, new, wondrous thing. We must have spent about four or five weeks there while this National Polish Alliance helped my parents find [a place to] rent.

Nobody would rent to people with seven children. So my parents had to buy a home, and apparently the home that they found was in Plainville, Connecticut. They didn't find the home; the Polish National Alliance helped them find a home, and then they [the Alliance] gave them a loan in order to make a down payment on the house. And this is what we moved into, a two-story house.

I think that the Polish National Alliance also helped get my father the factory job. In fact, he not only had one

factory job, but he had two factory jobs. So he would finish working eight hours in New Britain, Connecticut, and then he'd pedal to Bristol, Connecticut—

MS. RICHARDS: Pedal on a bike?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —and work in one of their factories for another eight hours.

MS. RICHARDS: On a bike?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: On a bike, yes. So—

MS. RICHARDS: And your mother was also working?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: My mother worked as well, and that's got a whole story, in that my sisters and I became the mothers in terms of doing the housework and the chores and the laundry in a place that was really uncivilized. The boys would fling shoes into the cupboard where clothing was supposed to be for doing laundry.

MS. RICHARDS: Your brothers.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: My brothers, right. My younger brother was the civilized one, and my oldest brother was a civilized one, but the two middle ones were not.

Anyway, we had to do all the cooking. It was a hugely painful thing to have my mother taken away from us. She left at seven o'clock in the morning and came back, like, at six thirty at night. She did that on Saturdays as well.

MS. RICHARDS: What kind of work was she doing?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: She did cleaning in a restaurant, and not too long thereafter she started doing the salads and the pies and all the baked things, all the desserts. In fact, she got to be known for her banana bread, which was wonderful.

She actually liked working, but she had to leave her year-and-a-half-old child by himself in the house. He would often take a little red wagon and walk around the house. And there was a driveway through which trucks came, because we were close to the center of Plainville. So that is still a memory that is extremely hard for me to—

MS. RICHARDS: Because the rest of you were in school?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: The rest of us were in school, but my younger sister would take the afternoons off to watch him in the afternoon, and my older brother would be able to watch him in the mornings. But this was not like a regular thing. Often he was alone. And how he survived is a kind of miracle.

He's my favorite of all the siblings. I helped raise him. I really helped raise him, and I adored him. From the time that he was born, he was like a miracle in the camps. And I almost felt like he was my child, and he was my most sort of beloved toy. I loved, loved playing with him.

MS. RICHARDS: He's about two years younger?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, he's seven years younger than I am.

MS. RICHARDS: I see.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: My younger sister is two years younger, and I think he's another four years younger than her.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Something like that.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Maybe not seven, maybe six. I don't know. I'll have to—

MS. RICHARDS: So you started in school there, I guess elementary school.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, that's right.

MS. RICHARDS: And learning English must have been a challenge.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, no, it was easy. Within six months, nobody knew I came from a foreign land, except my clothes were just so pathetic compared to what the kids normally wore. I still had a pair of slacks that were made out of a U.S. Army blanket, so they were gray, and things that nobody else wore. And I wore hide shoes that kids used to make fun of, because that's all I had.

I remember my teacher in fourth grade buying me for Valentine's Day the most beautiful dress, that had all these hearts on it. And it had these poufed-out sleeves that looked like you could see through them. These were white, and the rest of it was red, red, and it had some silken thing at the top.

It was beautiful in the sense that it was so fancy, it was so—and I never wore it. I never wore it. I guess I thought I might in some way hurt it, or—I can't remember what happened to that dress. But I think what I did—because we could never afford to give gifts to other people—it was like a Christmas thing that happened, and it might have even been the next year, because it wasn't for the same teacher that I did this, but I think I gave it as a gift to someone where you had to exchange gifts in school. Because I didn't know what else I could give her [—I had not money -UvR].

But I did have an older sister that loved us enormously—loved me and my younger sister enormously. There was such a deep feeling between the three of us. There was just so much love between us.

Not that I didn't whack my sister, the younger one, a lot, and she me, and we pulled one another's hair and we lied and we scratched and we did all these things, but it was all privately ours. Like you would never think of tattling to your mother or to your father. That wasn't an option.

It's not only that you would betray that relationship, but that they certainly didn't have time for it. They certainly weren't going to deal with it. And if my father dealt with it, you would be so sorry. If there was too much noise being made and my father was irritated by it, it would be a real disaster.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you recall, when you were in elementary school and even junior high, how you liked school, the subjects that you enjoyed the most, if you had any art classes?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah, they started me drawing right away. I didn't have any art classes, no, but for all the Christmas things—

[End of Track.]

[In progress]—they had me do the panels inside the classroom.

MS. RICHARDS: Now, when you're saying they had you do it, there was—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: The teacher did. The teacher—

MS. RICHARDS: —a point at some time when the teacher recognized that you were the right person to ask because you were more talented than the other students, or because—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think so.

MS. RICHARDS: —you were learning English?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think it's because I knew how to draw. No, it's not because she felt sorry for me. It's because I knew how to draw. Or, I didn't really know how to draw; I just did what I thought she wanted. But I guess I did it in a way that seemed better to her than what the others could do. So I would get time off from doing math and stuff like that, which I really liked. It was a little bit of a privileged position that I had.

MS. RICHARDS: Some people speak of that kind of thing as being the class artist.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you sense that that was your role?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: But it was that my role in fourth grade—and that's the same woman that bought—Miss McArthur—that bought that dress for me. She was an older lady, and she was very in tune to the fact that I was a newcomer from another country, which is rare in Plainville, to have somebody from another country. You're really a foreigner. Everybody was from Plainville, and most of their parents were from Plainville.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it mainly Catholic?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. Or, no, they weren't all Catholic. It wasn't a Catholic school; it was a public school.

So they were proud of—

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: But in Plainville itself there were—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: They had Catholic churches, but they had also Protestant churches. I don't know if they had a temple. I don't know. I don't think so. Plainville was small.

MS. RICHARDS: So, as you were growing up in those years—you were eight and a half when you started, when you went there—do you remember any experiences that relate to learning about art or seeing any reproductions in magazines or newspapers?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I do remember taking some art courses in high school. But I was a child that was so fearful of doing anything wrong. I had it hammered in me so heavily that I had to be a good girl, that it wasn't the usual adventurous, experimental childhood, because I took on huge responsibilities in the house—like from the fourth grade on, I paid the telephone bill.

I would sign my father's checks and bring them to the teller. She knew that I would do that, and everybody would just sort of understand. At some point when there was a new teller, they would say, "Where's your father? He's supposed to deposit these checks." And you would have to explain. You had these adult things—

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —that you had to take care of. Not just that, but actually run the whole house, make sure that my father got fed, make sure everybody got fed, and cook, the dishes.

And then we had renters, boarders that were below us, so I helped my mother clean their rooms. They were there for a dollar a day. They were Polish guys or single guys that were really not so clean with their habits, but it was a little bit of an additional income, so I think that's what they were thinking.

But ask that question again you asked.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were in elementary school and junior and senior high, if you recall any experiences seeing art, or even in reproductions or magazines—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: —or films or—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: —and related music, dance—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: —cultural experiences.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I never did anything cultural. I didn't even know there was such things as museums, I think, until later on. And if I saw any sculpture, it would be in a book, or if I saw any paintings, it would be in a book.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there something that you did regularly in the summers when there was no school?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I read a lot. I used to read a lot.

MS. RICHARDS: No summer camp or camping or—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah, there was a Y camp, a day camp. And then I was actually a counselor at that camp. Yeah, I worked.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there other jobs, do you recall, I guess when you were in high school?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I was a waitress, but that didn't happen, I think, until my [high school -UvR] senior year. I was a waitress in the restaurant that my mother worked at. It's called Cook's Tavern [where I waitressed throughout my college years -UvR].

And I did everything dutifully. I did everything conscientiously. And I say that with regret. I wish I could have

blown—the grid, the fenced-in psyche. But I am trying to still blow it, through my work.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were in high school—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I had no choice. I had to be that good.

MS. RICHARDS: —you knew from the friends you had made, the Americans, that this wasn't so usual that a daughter would be so obedient.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I knew, and they felt like—I only looked at them and I knew—it was very hard for me to be close to any of them because they didn't live for their family to help their family survive.

They lived for themselves, which is, I guess, what a kid is supposed to do. They lived for their own pleasures. They lived to dress themselves in certain ways and to have their hair done and to focus—a lot of focus on that.

And I knew clearly—painfully clearly—that I was the poorest one of them all. These were all middle class kids, maybe even lower middle class, but middle class, and they had parents that did things that were respectable, like teachers. They were high school teachers, or one of them owned a small Studebaker car sales place.

But they were all kind of goody girls. They didn't try things. So I guess, in a sense, that they were like me that way, and they studied. I studied a lot.

I loved my literature teacher. Anybody who taught—our geometry teacher—anybody who taught as though they were passionate about the literature, passionate about the geometry, it would sink in, but that wasn't very frequent. Plainville High School was not a very good high school. But there was a whole rhythm of my going to school.

MS. RICHARDS: When you got to high school, your older siblings, were they in college or working or still in Plainville?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: My older brother joined the Marines. And he was one who was just a wonderful, wonderful human being that had a horrible history.

MS. RICHARDS: Is this Eugene?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It's Eugene. There's a horrible history. Anyway, he ended up—he's dead. He's a long time dead. And he never had the life that he should have had. And I think, A, coming to this country, B, having the kind of father my father was, which comes with its brutality to my brother—the rest of us, too, but my brother in special ways that—I don't know, he just didn't have a chance. Anyway, he's gone.

But what was—

MS. RICHARDS: You had the siblings who were older than you—four older than you—so by the time you were in high school, were they still in Plainville and part of your life and helping the household, or were they—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, my younger sister was still with me. My older sister left for Western Reserve University. I remember picking her up on a plane. And this was 1956 maybe, when the planes just started going from Cleveland to Connecticut.

I watched her get off the plane, and she could have been a goddess. She had a gorgeous figure. She had a dress on, which was a simple cotton dress. She looked beautiful in it. She was [... stunningly beautiful -UvR] anyway—blonde, blonde hair. And she was coming from college, a place like a college. So she was my ideal.

MS. RICHARDS: What was her name?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Jessica.

MS. RICHARDS: Jessica.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: She was the one that I loved, loved, loved so much before she left, so that after she left, I think my sister and I spent three months crying ourselves to sleep every night.

MS. RICHARDS: It was quite an accomplishment for her, though, to go there.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It was a huge accomplishment. She had an aunt in Cleveland, so she could live with my aunt. She's my father's sister. She could live with her.

MS. RICHARDS: Did your father's sister come to the U.S. before your family did?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think she did—not much before, maybe—not much. She did. She came with her husband.

MS. RICHARDS: Was Jessica interested in the arts at all?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, nobody in my family really is, at all.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were the only one.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right. Possibly Eugene might have been, had he had a chance, because he would make things that nobody else would make, or could make, even with the most primitive materials.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. So that was Jessica. And then there's a brother just younger than she?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I never was close to him, but both of my brothers used to make airplanes out of balsa wood. They used to actually make them from scratch. There were no kits. They made them from scratch. And they bought the motors separately that they would put in.

They got to be quite famous around Plainville for the way that they could—these were hand-guided airplanes that just went around and around in circles. They had their own motor. And, in fact, one of my brothers had—at the Plainville High School assembly they had him do a demonstration of how the planes flew. They were really kind of brilliant that way.

MS. RICHARDS: What did he end up doing?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, one of them ended up being a sergeant in the Air Force, and he ended up having something like 60 people under him. He was able to single-handedly electrically wire a Boeing 707, the entire thing. He understood all of that really well.

He never wanted to become an officer, although he was asked many times to, because he had no respect for them. It was that they would do the administrative stuff, and he wanted to do the real stuff. But also it had to do with his self image, too. I think we all come kind of with our egos chopped up—

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —in a pretty dramatic way, having lived through what we lived through and having been brought up by somebody like my father. Not that he brought us up, but he was our father. He did bring us up. I mean, he had the responsibility of keeping us clothed and keeping us warm, and his idea of discipline.

MS. RICHARDS: When you finished high school, I read that you went to the University of New Hampshire. How did you decide to go there, and how did you decide what to study?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: My reasons for going there were just more stupid than you can ever imagine.

There was somebody who played the trombone who also went there, and she said it was terrific. And I thought, at that age—and this is—I'm already a senior. I thought that because I said to her, "Oh, it's a place that I would really like to go to, and I'll probably go there," then I actually felt obliged to go there, even though I never saw her again. I don't know what's wrong with my mind, do you know?

And it really wasn't the right choice for me. However, I did have somebody named Christopher Cook there who taught painting. He didn't like my painting, because at that time he did abstract work, and I did work that was not abstract.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, that time skips ahead a little bit. You were actually in a painting class painting when you went to New Hampshire. A, how did you afford to go? And, B, how did you end up studying art?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: How did I afford to go? My parents actually had a real belief in education, so they paid for the tuition, but I paid for everything else. I was a waitress while I was there, and then I was a waitress all through the summer, so all my savings through the summer went to help with the tuition. Whatever was not paid they would help with.

There was no question but that they wanted all of their children educated. Some took advantage and some did not. Like the two boys, Hank—Henry, I mean Henry—and Johnny did not. Henry went to a junior college, but he never really used his education, and Johnny went right from high school to the Air Force. The rest of the children went to college.

MS. RICHARDS: Jessica, you said, went to Case Western.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Case Western. And she actually got a Ph.D. in mathematics. She teaches high school, but she also taught at Georgia Tech part-time. She's very, very smart.

It turns out that this family now has somebody—that the offspring of my generation—one of their offspring is teaching at Harvard. Another one just graduated from Brown and went to Harvard to get her master's.

In other words, these are now people that have more of a sense of their rights, of their abilities, of the fact that they could take something for themselves.

MS. RICHARDS: They have permission.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, and that they don't have to be constantly denying [themselves -UvR] because someone is going to suffer as a result. And that's how it was with seven children. You really watched what you ate. And if we ever had meat, I had the ribs of a chicken. No, I'm sorry, it's the ribs of a rabbit that I had. They have real ribs. The chicken only has that—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, thing next to the breast.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: So that I would take the meat off the ribs—you can imagine how much meat there was on the ribs of a rabbit—because I was so aware; this is what was drilled into me—I was so aware of what everybody ate, what everybody also was eating. And my mother would live on whatever was left over on anybody's plate. That was her food. That's what she would live on, for many, many years.

MS. RICHARDS: So I was asking how you ended up studying art, having a painting class. You mentioned Christopher Cook, how you ended up there.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: But getting back to food for a moment, when my mother worked in a restaurant, you could imagine her head being blown open when she saw all of this food—all of this whipped cream, all of these eggs; all of these were so hard to get—that she gained something like a hundred pounds in the first six months of being in the United States, because she was in the restaurant. She was privy to all of this food.

And then it all died down. She became much more normal in weight as time went on. But she would bring—

MS. RICHARDS: Did something like that happen to you when you were a waitress?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, no. She would bring food from the restaurant in cans, leftover food that she would warm [up] for us. That's what we used to eat for years when we first came to the United States, because there were seven kids.

MS. RICHARDS: Before you became the cook.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, before I became the cook, but even then, she would bring home—that was a part of the food—

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —which you might use. So we kind of had a lot of leftovers from people's plates in the restaurant. Me, the only thing I would drink is when I would serve the drinks for the people, if a drink looked particularly enticing, I would take a little sip. Like a daiquiri, or—take a little sip before I [served] it, but I was always skinny. Today I'm skinny too.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, having grown up the way you did, it would seem—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, I love food. I love food. I love to cook. I'm big on cooking, and I have a favorite friend and he and I just cook. That's what we do together.

MS. RICHARDS: You're a self-taught cook?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, sure. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Anything else about food before we go to art?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, that's—well, there's just one more story, I guess, about my mother. For a while my mother had wild cats. They were angora cats. They were incredibly beautiful. This is on Tomlinson Avenue, where my father had his barn and where we had that little half-acre and a garden.

The whole back woods was filled with her cats. They were wild, so none of them went in the house. They had

these horns that wrapped around the bottoms of their ears, and they had white, white, white hair with dark, dark horns, so that when her car drove into the driveway, she would have two cans of leftover food from the restaurant people, and she had two big garbage can lids into which she would dump these cans of food.

But they wouldn't even wait—that forest would come to life with 40 cats, as they saw her coming with her two cans. And she would fill one garbage can cover and another. And of course, they'd have a real pecking order. The king would come and eat first. Not that they waited, but somehow he got there first. And the only [person] that they would allow to touch some of them was my mother. My mother could pet some of them on the head.

But, anyway—this was almost a little bit of a continuation of what happened, because this happened toward the end of my mother's life. It happened years after we left the—no, actually some of it was happening while we were there. Actually, that was happening while we were there, but still, we were less desperate for food, and [she] was able to get the extras for the—

MS. RICHARDS: For the cats.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —for the cats.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you want to have a pet indoors?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, I took one of those cats indoors, actually, from a little baby. And it wasn't a happy ending. It ended up slicing my [sister's] nose in half because it was so terrified. They were not to be domesticated.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: So I'm sorry I did that to the cat.

MS. RICHARDS: So, go back to college. And being in an art class and imagining—how did that happen? When you first went to college, or when you got there and had to declare a degree or decide what courses to take, what were you thinking about studying?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, I guess I was first thinking of being a physical therapist—this was again the do-gooder—but I never took any physical therapy courses, so I don't know how serious that could have been. That was my freshman year.

I actually bought myself a new outfit, with shoes to match a sweater—red shoes with a red sweater with a beautiful gray skirt—for the university when I first went there.

And I took a history course from a man—[Dr. Fascinelli -UVR]—who was fantastically good at relating how consequential artworks were. And this is art history, starting from the beginning. I don't think he went totally to contemporary art, but—to hear him speak of Hagia Sophia.

He had a stutter, and it would make it even more emphatic how much he cared for these things, how much he enjoyed looking at them, and how much I enjoyed seeing his slide projections.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you take art history just because it was a liberal arts course option, or did you have a sense that—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I guess I must have wanted to take it. I don't think it was a necessary thing. I guess I was starting to lean that way. And I did take an art course with Christopher Cook, who was a wonderful human being, but he was heavy, heavy, heavy abstract art, period. All the other stuff was "worthless."

However, my paintings were probably worthless. He was probably right. He was pretty rough on them, and maybe right that he saw—

MS. RICHARDS: What did they look like? And what could you have—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I would do faces of people, or I would do models—drawings of models and paintings of models. I don't know, I just know what they looked like later on, that they looked very—concrete.

MS. RICHARDS: You're talking about figurative paintings.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Figurative, right.

MS. RICHARDS: Using the model in class.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. If I were painting objects, that they looked as though they had a gravitational pull on them.

MS. RICHARDS: Sculptural.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: They looked sculptural, right.

And then, of course, the paintings afterwards became—I started building on the faces. I started making them more three-dimensional with glue and sand, so that they kept [building up -UvR]—and I still put paint on top—

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is still in college?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: This is later than that. It was later than that.

MS. RICHARDS: And you were living in an apartment or a dorm?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I was living in an apartment. And these things got so heavy that they actually fell off the canvas, and—

MS. RICHARDS: Was there a sculpture class that you could have taken? Did you think of that?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I took a drawing class at the School for Social Research, actually, during the summer, which was kind of important for me.

MS. RICHARDS: In New York?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: In New York. It was after—

MS. RICHARDS: Did you spend the summer?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: This is a long time later.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, this was after. Oh, okay.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: But I'm now [in] 1971 instead of [1962 -UvR]—

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, okay.

[Cross talk.]

So you started college in 1960, when you were 18.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's right.

MS. RICHARDS: And you had that wonderful art history—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And I met my husband in high school, when I was 15—my former husband.

MS. RICHARDS: Was he in high school with you?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: He was, and we shared a chemistry lab together. We did chemistry together, but he was brilliant, brilliant in chemistry, and I was terrible, terrible, so I let him do all the experiments. And he was a very, very smart, very creative guy—

MS. RICHARDS: And this is Milton?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —who was pretty disturbed.

MS. RICHARDS: His name?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Milton, M-I-L-T-O-N. He has the same last name that I have.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you understand that he was disturbed then?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I knew that he was excruciatingly shy. And I knew that he would be more boastful than he should be about his intelligence. I was ashamed how boastful he was. It got him into trouble, but he didn't seem to care. I knew he had no friends, and I knew he was not popular.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that a kind of reason for him to be attractive to you, actually, because he was—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, that was a reason why—

MS. RICHARDS: —he needed to be taken care of?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, but what was attractive was that he was a person whose summer job was to squirt DDT. It's a milky substance that he had on his [back in a tank -UvR]. He did it with two other guys that were also his high school buddies that were in the same class. And he taught them how to—I know that this isn't a great solution, but—how to dig deep, deep, deep holes and to pour it in there, instead of killing—because he knew what it would do. It would kill the frogs and the very things that would kill the insects, so that he would never spray it. I don't know how they got away with this.

And he would read Rachel Carson's book—

MS. RICHARDS: *Silent Spring*.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —*Silent Spring*. He would read that to them. It was like his Bible. So he converted them too.

He had a laboratory in his basement that was so impressive. He got all these things himself because nobody was—there were no scientists in his life. This is what he did. And he had, actually, a pretty decent microscope, with all of these chemicals and all, and he would stay until late in the night, from the time he was in fourth grade, working there. He didn't much care—

MS. RICHARDS: This is in his basement?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: In his basement, because he didn't much care [what others thought -UvR]. That's why I liked him. And that he grew orchids when he was in junior high school that won state awards, and nobody believed that he did it. The father kept saying, "It's my son that did it," because the father built a greenhouse for him. The greenhouse was very—everything is very podunk, right, but nevertheless it functioned like a greenhouse. He was able to do that during the winters as well.

They did not believe that a young child could do this. And he did some kind of a medication for dogs because he loved animals. I loved him because he was the smartest man in Plainville. I didn't know anybody smarter. And I have a thing for smart men.

MS. RICHARDS: So, he went to the University of New Hampshire as well?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, he went to Clark University. He actually received a Harvard Book Award, but Harvard didn't accept him. Anyway, he went to Clark University.

MS. RICHARDS: When you left—he was in the same year as you were in high school?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: He was in the same year as I was.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you graduated and went to different colleges—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, that's right, and he wrote—every [day], he wrote—

MS. RICHARDS: —you felt like you were boyfriend/girlfriend. Did you break up or—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, we didn't. We didn't. We wrote every day to one another.

Anyway, I think I probably don't want to describe this relationship too much more, except that the poor guy ended up being a paranoid schizophrenic and bipolar. At the age of 27 this happened. It happened just at the time when I was about to give birth to our child. And I think that that's a part of what tipped him over, because I could no longer pay total attention to him. I had somebody else that I had to pay attention to, plus a full-time job.

So a lot of what happened after I married him was putting him through medical school, which meant a full-time job teaching plus a part-time job at a Jewish Y, afternoons and weekends.

MS. RICHARDS: So, just to fill in the gap for a moment, you left New Hampshire before you graduated.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, I left New Hampshire after two years and went to the University of Miami, because he went there.

MS. RICHARDS: And did you get married, or you just went down there?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I got married as I entered my junior year.

MS. RICHARDS: In Miami.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I got married in Plainville.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's where all of our—his people are there; my people were there.

MS. RICHARDS: And then you both went down to Florida.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, then I transferred to Florida in my junior year because he was there, but I was in a dormitory and he was in a dormitory. And then in the senior year we lived together.

MS. RICHARDS: And so then, you were saying you worked, after you graduated—you got a B.A. or a B.F.A.?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't even want to say what I got. It was such a joke.

MS. RICHARDS: But that was at the University of Florida.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That was at University of Miami.

MS. RICHARDS: In Coral Gables.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: In Coral Gables, exactly.

MS. RICHARDS: And you put him through college and—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I put him through medical school.

MS. RICHARDS: Medical school, sorry. And you were teaching, right?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And the one thing I wanted from him—because there wasn't a lot—okay, I won't go there, but the one thing I wanted is a child. So I think the day of his graduation from medical school he said, "All right, all right, we'll have one when I graduate medical school."

So the day he graduated, I think I conceived, because I was on these heavy Enovid-E contraceptive pills that—once you get off, you're very, very fertile. So the day he graduated, I think I conceived, or the day before, day after.

MS. RICHARDS: And during those, what, two years there? You were there two years in Florida?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: In Florida? Two years undergraduate and then four years afterwards. Four years I was a teacher in high school.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I see. And you weren't doing any art yourself.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I was painting on weekends, but everything had to dance around my husband's needs, which meant I had to work full-time for him plus part-time, which meant I had to do all the housework. I had to launder his clothes. I sewed him all of his clothes. I know how to sew. And it was like I was partially numb the whole time I was married to him.

MS. RICHARDS: But you went after that to Berkeley.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, that's right.

MS. RICHARDS: And that was because he got an appointment—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: He was a resident. He was doing his residency in psychiatry at Berkeley Memorial Hospital. So I worked full-time as a teacher again, and he just began losing it.

MS. RICHARDS: And you had the baby.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, that's right.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you take any classes or go to any lectures at Berkeley?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I did, actually. I took some drawing classes at Berkeley.

MS. RICHARDS: Who did you study with in the art department?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: In the art department, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: This was in fall 1969?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you take figure drawing or—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, it was figure drawing again.

MS. RICHARDS: Elmer Bischoff?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, no, no. It wasn't anybody well known, and I think he was part-time. I'm sorry.

MS. RICHARDS: It's okay. And you took that just one semester or the whole academic year?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I took it—it's not even full-time one semester, because I taught full-time and I had a little baby. I think it was one or two evenings a week.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it a regular class, or a kind of university extension? Was it a regular class that met in the evening, or did you have to go into a special program to take evening classes?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I'm not even sure how I signed up, but I was not an enrolled student, so I was an external—

MS. RICHARDS: Did you enjoy that class?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —external person. I wasn't overjoyed, but obviously I needed it, because I went through tremendous acrobatics to do it, and it was really a choice that was for me. It wasn't for anybody else. So something is sprouting, something's beginning.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you meet any—at that point in Berkeley, meet any artists or art students or visiting lecturers?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Mm-mm. [Negative.] The people I met were the people that—my whole time was spent keeping my former husband from going crazy. It was really time-consuming, so that we went to the friends that he hung around with after his duties as a resident—who were not artists.

But in California, a lot of people say they're artists, and they're really people who do marijuana, do drugs. They kind of dress in an arty way, but I don't see any art, or if I do, it's so minimal that you don't even know how it is that they came to identify themselves that way.

MS. RICHARDS: So, at a certain point you left with your daughter?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, that's right.

MS. RICHARDS: The two of you?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's right.

MS. RICHARDS: And went back to Connecticut?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's right, but I went back to Connecticut with him, again to try to save him. I lived with him in Connecticut at the home of his parents. They have a separate apartment next to their house.

I lived there with him—this time I had his father to help me manage him, but by this time he was really unmanageable. And by this time I clearly knew that I had to leave, for the safety of my child and for my safety. So when he was institutionalized, at the Institute of the Living in Hartford, I left.

And then there were times when he would surface again, but not for long—very, very ill—because he was incredibly upset about my divorcing him, and he was trying to counteract that somehow.

And then my daughter and I were alone, which was wonderful. It was just wonderful. For a number of years I was in a cold-water flat, and it's a building that my father owned, of Polish people. It was like a ghetto.

MS. RICHARDS: So he had built up resources enough to buy—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: My father? Yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Even though he had these—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think he had two buildings.

MS. RICHARDS: —low-level factory jobs.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, yes. They saved all the money. They saved it. And he became a man when he collected the rent in all these places. Everybody gave him a shot of whiskey and gave him the money, and that's when he was the man. But they were all Polish, so he was able to be somebody with the Poles.

And he had a group of Poles with whom he worked. He would tar our roof with these Poles. He would never pay them. I don't know how it is that they were so loyal to him, but they really liked him. He was a great storyteller. He was able to keep this group together in a way that just was commendable on how bonded they were to him, or how much they liked working for him, because he was tough. He was really tough. He would work them under extraordinary circumstances, with tremendous heat, or there were sort of semi-dangerous situations.

MS. RICHARDS: So I said—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: This was leading somewhere.

MS. RICHARDS: I said that he had accumulated enough money to actually own something. But you said you lived in an apartment that—a building he owned.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, he owned these buildings. The maintenance was done with him and his team. They worked on weekends with him, and they loved it. My mother would cook all this food for them to come, and they'd drink beer. They had a blast. They had a wonderful time. I think my father had three buildings before he died.

MS. RICHARDS: So you—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And, again, the rent was like \$40 a month or something. It wasn't like—but still, it was wonderful. It was great.

MS. RICHARDS: So you lived with your daughter, and you were working again as a teacher in Connecticut?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, I was working as a teacher. I worked at San Leandro Junior High School [in California -UvR].

MS. RICHARDS: San Leandro?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Teaching art?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Teaching art. And I just want to say two things, that, one—it's because I had to work, as my husband was so ill in California. I also worked at a junior high there. And I was pregnant. And at that time, the moment you started to show, they fired you. They asked you to leave.

And I needed the income so badly—I really had no source of income other than my income, because my husband was no longer able to be a resident. They asked him to take a leave—I was supporting him and I was supporting my daughter.

So I was starting to show, and I wore a lab coat anyway as an art teacher, so that I wouldn't [be found out -UvR]—and because I'm so tall, I was able to hold it so that it didn't stick out too far. And I was very muscular too, so that—anyway, I got away without anybody knowing that I was pregnant.

And I had it in my mind, that if they did—I clearly had it in my mind—if they did try to fire me as a result of my being pregnant, I would take it to the Civil Liberties Union and I would fight it. And it wasn't long after that, where that was considered—that that could no longer be done.

So in the junior high that I was working in, in Connecticut, when my former husband was at the Institute of the Living, I was speaking to a guy who was an art teacher across the hallway, and I asked him about his medical

insurance. Because obviously we were involved with that because he was hospitalized. And he talked about his wife having a procedure done in a hospital, and how he was [covered medically -UvR], and the medical insurance only paid like 90 percent of [her procedure -UvR].

I said, "You mean your medical insurance covers your wife?" He said, "Oh, yeah. It covers my wife, my kids." And I said to him, "But mine only covers me." And he was surprised to hear that. He never heard that.

So I did call the Civil Liberties Union. And I asked the other women teachers—one was home ec and one something else—to come in on it with me because they had the same problem I did. They wouldn't, because they were afraid of losing their jobs. They didn't say it that way, but they wouldn't come in on it with me.

I met with lawyers, the Civil Liberties Union lawyers; they met with me after school. One was nicer than the next; they kept changing. And I got the medical insurance coverage for not only the woman teaching, but for her family, for that entire county. The county just wrote a letter to that effect to me, saying that the case was settled, and that this is how they settled it.

There was no speech—the superintendent didn't come and talk to me. Neither did the principal. Nobody said anything; it was just changed. So I was happy to do that, and somehow I'm feeling my oats a little bit more now. But still, the [making of the art was hard won -UvR]—I would make some things—and I was more and more alone with my daughter now.

Then I taught at Farmington High School, which was a much more sophisticated town that had students that were much more interesting and much more talented that I taught [in] for [two years -UvR]—

[End of Track.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is a continuation of disc one.

So I think we were—you were in Connecticut teaching and just about to think about going to graduate school. Can you talk about that?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. At that time I was actually doing some things, three-dimensional things, that I sewed. Much of it was made out of muslin, and some of it almost looked like Pop art, in a sense. Others, it was kind of more sexually oriented.

MS. RICHARDS: Your intention was to be making art.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, that was art. Yes, that's right. But I was no longer painting.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I was making sewn pieces.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember the moment when you said, I'm not a painter; I'm a sculptor?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, I don't think that there is a such a moment, but that the paintings, as I think I might have mentioned before, just became more and more three-dimensional, to the extent where, in one of them, the chunks just fell down onto the ground. The gravity sort of claimed it.

And even then, I didn't say, Oh, I'm a sculptor. Because when I applied to Columbia University—and more than anything I wanted to go to New York City. I just felt like that was a place where my mind would finally have a chance. I felt that after the divorce, after I had sort of cleared out my life of an obligation to someone else, I had my beautiful daughter that I could take with me and go to New York. I was just extremely bent on that.

So I applied both to the sculpture and the painting department. That is, when they said, "Which department would you like?" I said, "Either one is fine." And I'm very glad that I ended up in the sculpture department.

I think that there was a person, by the name of Jean Linder, who actually liked my sewn pieces—or she was, I think, one of the main people who decided on accepting me, because there were a lot of males at Columbia University then that would not have understood that art, or that would not have liked that art.

So I think she's the one that—because I [got to -UvR] know her art after I came to the university, and it was something that had sexual orientation, that had things like plastic Vac-u-form pieces that would—

[Audio break.]

I didn't yet go to Columbia.

MS. RICHARDS: You were talking about the fact that she accepted your work.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Again, that I applied both to sculpture and the painting department.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, you said that.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And the sculpture department accepted me because Jean Linder, I think, was the one that understood the work that I was doing.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: [My work -UvR] had a sexual orientation not unlike the one that she had in her own work.

I came to New York City, with my father having packed a truck with my worldly possessions. It was a pickup truck, a relatively small pickup truck. I came with my daughter, who was then two and a half years old. I came with my bird—our bird. My brother Stash took me. And the truck was piled so high—

MS. RICHARDS: What was your brother's name?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Stash—Stanley. I call him Stash. And the truck was piled so high because it had all of my furniture in it. It had my mattress. It had everything, because I couldn't afford to buy anything when I came to New York City.

I did have an apartment ready that Columbia University gave us, that had a bedroom, and it was actually quite a lovely apartment. It was not far from the Riverside Church.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember what street it was on?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, Claremont Avenue—150 Claremont Avenue. As I crossed the bridges from Connecticut to New York City, I just felt such a sense of excitement and such a sense of being free. I don't even know what "free" means, but such a sense of the possibilities of having [my own -UvR] options, that I never had before.

And the truck was piled so high that in crossing these bridges, when the wind blew, I thought that the truck had a chance of tipping over, that it felt a little bit like we were in a boat of sorts. But we made it—we made it to Claremont Avenue. My brother helped unpack.

It was a whole nother life for me that began by going to Columbia University, because at that time, given how shy I was and given how naïve I was, it was a sheltered sort of chicken wing for me to be able to hibernate under, until I was able to more readily sort of peek out and figure out what parts I could actually face and use in this city.

So my only charge then, my entire family, was my daughter and myself, and my daughter was kind of my emotional core during the entire time of her growing up. It was 10 full years before I got seriously involved with another person emotionally. So I felt like these were years that were hugely explorative years for the both of us. She was young, she was [beautiful, and I adored her -UvR]. She went to the Riverside—

[END SD 1.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Ursula von Rydingsvard on November 16, 2011, in her studio in Brooklyn [NY], for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc two.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Hi, Judith, again.

So, coming to the city was, again, a fresh new life where the only choices I had to make were the choices for me and for my daughter. I did not have to think about anyone else.

At Columbia University our studios were on 125th Street. They have a place called Prentice Hall, in which my studio was. It was a studio that was really quite doable, given what I had had before this time.

And I had teachers like Leon Goldin, who taught painting, who's an extremely kind person. And I had Saul Schwartz, who was also a wonderful man, in terms of bringing in things from his home for me to look at that seemed so appropriate. He brought in a grater once that was quite beautiful.

At that time I was working in steel, and what I did with the steel was, in a sense, so frustrating. There was a kind of futility [in] my working with steel. But the things that I thought were better than anything that I've done in

steel were the sheets on top of which I welded liquid steel from steel rod.

And I would weld them in a way as though I was almost saying a prayer. I would make lines with these dots that were on the steel plates that would go from left to right. And the steel plate itself would make warps that would make that plate feel very much like a fabric, so that it was a way of sort of taming or humanizing that [steel sheet -UvR].

MS. RICHARDS: You had been working with fabric, and you dropped that to start working with steel. For what reason?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I didn't want to work with fabric anymore because I didn't think the work that I was making with fabric was good enough.

MS. RICHARDS: And steel seemed appropriate.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And it always felt not substantial enough. I don't even know how I could define "substantial" in relationship to those sewn pieces.

But sometimes the sewn pieces were too much like a one-liner, and it really pissed me off. Although at other times I would go to extremes to make a life-size figure that was actually pulling out stuff from her throat that was very disturbing. I don't even know where that piece is anymore, but it took a lot of work. And it was made of a silklike material.

MS. RICHARDS: In—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I never thought of why am I not working with [fabric -UvR]—because I never wanted to really continue—although I was doing things that were crocheted, that were knitted, in which I was making long forms that were wormlike forms that had ties at the end of it. And I would make them and pile them up, but I didn't like those either.

MS. RICHARDS: At that time, were you going to museums, galleries, looking—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I was.

MS. RICHARDS: And do you recall any works that really made an impression, maybe in particular by a woman? A woman sculptor, the rare—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, I remember seeing the machine show [*The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*] at the Museum of Modern Art, which really impressed me. And I remember the Tinguely piece—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —in which the metal pieces were so playful. There was one in which—I can't even remember whether we, as viewers, were able to throw that black ball, but somehow it felt so sweetly energized. It wasn't anything that had machismo or toughness in it. And it was certainly large enough. But it had a catalogue that came with a metal cover on it—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, I remember.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —that suited that show so well. I remember looking at Giacometti a lot wherever I could find him.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there other European artists whose work you had a chance to see—that's in the early '70s, when you were at Columbia?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I just remember looking at Rodin and thinking him so theatrical, so over the top, so—and it wasn't like Michelangelo's intensity, which always felt more real to me. Even though it was so classical, it had a psychology that felt as though it had greater depth or greater complexity. But I think Rodin—how can I really complain about Rodin, but I do.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, you're talking about two figurative—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: —Giacometti and Rodin.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have a chance to see Eva Hesse's work?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, I did. I'm crazy about Eva Hesse's work. I thought she had a great sense of humor. I thought she was extremely inventive. I thought it was just the way I wanted to see a woman work.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you in tune at all with the early stages of the feminist movement?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about politics at that point? The Vietnam War was winding down, and—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I'm sorry to say I blocked out so much of that, because anything that was political—I could hardly read the newspapers because of the power that the politicians had, and of the power that these events had. A power of destruction, especially toward children, or toward humans, that it was just too hard for me to read, and that even if I did, it would sort of—it would fall out; it wouldn't sink in enough.

And it's not until fairly recently that I've been able to actually understand politics, maybe like the last 15, 20 years, that I've been able to understand the depth of my paranoia toward these people who are in power, which would just make this thing surface, this anger and this thing surface. It just wouldn't let me go very far. I think I've been able to control that a little bit more the last 20 years. It's time. Congratulations.

MS. RICHARDS: I understand that you had a job, maybe briefly, while you were in graduate school, at MoMA.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: What was that?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I was sitting at the reception desk. I was a receptionist. And I actually took Kate Linker's place, who used to be a writer. She used to be a critic. I don't think she does it anymore, because she married a guy who's an [... -UvR] architect [Bernard Tschumi -UvR], so I think she kind of devoted her life to him and to the children, to raising the children.

But I took her place for the summer, and it was wonderful, in the sense that I was in such close proximity to such fantastic artists. It's when I fell in love with Cézanne. I was really able to reap from—I recall some of the very early paintings that he did of women, and his relationship to women, which seems so charged, especially in his early years, and then what happens as he goes on.

But, nevertheless, later on it just gets more—in some ways—more tame with his energy, but much, much more complex visually, even with what he doesn't paint on the canvas, as well as what gets painted. And that I loved that his things felt, even with the way in which he applied the paint. It felt as though it had weight, and it had weight even in places where there was no paint, because of the way he painted, and that all this stuff about the circle and the triangle and the square is such hogwash.

I never knew who ever brought that up in connection with Cézanne, to simplify it to such a sort of stupid equation of looking at him—I don't even know what they mean. I still haven't figured out what they mean by saying that. But it obviously doesn't really matter.

And then there's Matisse, who was so full of curves and so sensuous, and his pinks are fantastic, as are his reds and his greens—green greens—and that there is a kind of joy that you feel is woven in there. Even in his later life when he brought in a bouquet of flowers, and from that bouquet things would sprout on his canvas that were just—

It's the credible joy. It's not fabricated. It's not designed. It's able to communicate those feelings in a way that were so complex and so credible—marvelous.

MS. RICHARDS: Some people have written about seeing a relationship—which I don't think that you accept quite—between the kind of gestural work that you do with Abstract Expressionist gesture. Of course, that was around in the galleries and museums in the '70s still, along with Minimalism and along with *Artforum*, which you might have seen—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: —maybe read—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: —in graduate school. So how were those different streams of artistic activity affecting you when

you were working in steel, you said?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah, I had a huge crush on de Kooning. And I went through this a number of times. I went through that a number of times with, actually, Cézanne, with the people that I'm talking about, and Matisse.

And when one says that my surfaces have something to do with Abstract Expressionism, my chest just swells, because I think, Yes, yes, it's got to be de Kooning they're referring to. And if it is, then it's such a compliment, in that de Kooning, too, dipped into places with such courage, like the tremendous transitions that he had within a year, sometimes with the same moment, the things that he was doing.

Being the opposite of a good boy, the boy that makes art with a capital A, that follows the rules. He didn't care—I don't even know if he consciously says that to himself, I don't care about their rules. I don't think you do. You just are who you are.

And that he had this transplant from Holland to the United States, which I think is always a thing that enables—well, sometimes it clamps you up, but it sometimes enables a fresh steam coming out, fresh emotional opportunities that can come out that maybe couldn't [otherwise].

And just the fact that he actually got away from his mom, with whom he had a pretty intense relationship. In the United States, he was kind of free of that. She didn't visit him very often, so he was on his own.

I'm not even saying that he had a happy life, because I never even know what that means. I'm maybe even saying he suffered, because, God knows, he had enough drunken brawls, and being found in the ditches and all of that. But it feels like he gave to himself.

And when I saw his last show at MoMA, it's like, This man had balls. He had a huge amount of visual savvy. He had a heart. But it wasn't necessarily probably an intellectual heart. But I do remember him saying, when somebody in *Art in America* had this debate on who's the better artist, is it de Kooning or is it—

MS. RICHARDS: Pollock?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, no, no, not Pollock.

Can you stop that for a moment?

[Audio break.]

Art in America had a debate as to who the better artist was, Arshile Gorky or de Kooning. And de Kooning was still alive; Arshile Gorky by then had committed suicide. So de Kooning writes a letter back saying, "Please let this kind, sweet, talented man rest in peace," that there is no need to debate that question. So he is an artist that I look up to [now] probably even more than I did before, after having seen this show that John Elderfield did.

MS. RICHARDS: We've talked about a number of great painters. Were there sculptors whose work you especially took energy and inspiration from?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I saw the work of [Julio] Gonzalez at the Guggenheim Museum. He's not somebody you could get bowled over by, but there's such a sweetness and there's a kind of poetry in his work. There's a kind of gentleness that I love seeing.

[Richard] Stankiewicz, as well, who did the humorous pieces, before he got serious and went Minimal. Again, there was such a sweetness, such a kind of personal orientation about play and about life, connecting to life.

With David Smith—his lyrical works, the ones with the amazing profiles and landscapes within the profiles, I like a lot. I think a lot of his work [and the -UvR] humor in it, just by the way he places those portions of the bells, or the way he places those tools.

I'm not sure that I'm a huge fan of the more Minimal works that become stainless steel, that he grinds with a grinder, with one cube on top of another. I like the more figuratively oriented—it would be difficult to say they're figurative, but with the wagons and the wheels and such—I respond more to them.

And I think the things that he said at that Guggenheim show about the landscape in which he lived, with the mountains that he said would weep like women—the kind of descriptions or the things that he said, have influenced me—not influenced me, but I really like reading his words. And that, again, they're of a man who is grounded in something that feels like a reality that isn't fabricated for art. It's a reality that is both the life of the man, of who he is, and what he makes.

Okay, you want to put that down?

[Audio break.]

MS. RICHARDS: So it sounds like you were working hard and looking—you spent the summer at MoMA. And that was a two-year graduate program?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Is there anything else you wanted to say about that, or we can move on to after you graduated.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: We had visiting artists that came in. One of them was Philip Guston. He was at the point where it was perhaps five or six years before he died, and he was saying that he was—maybe it was a little bit longer before he died, but he was at a point where he said, "I don't know what I'm doing with my work." Because he had already changed toward being something that was more figuratively oriented and had a huge amount of psychological content that was so potent.

And he would say things like that he would visit a chapel that had a number of Giotto murals, and the bottom of the chapel had columns with Mary's face on it. He said he would stand in front of the column and look at Mary's face. And he couldn't take it for any longer than just for a short, short period of time, and he'd have to turn around again, almost as though to catch his breath so he could look at that face again.

The vulnerability with which he spoke about his work impressed me so deeply, because one can be honest with students almost like you can with no one else. Now, a student audience is not a normal audience. A student audience is really waiting and wanting to take what you have to give. But a normal audience, they take it, they don't take it—they have options. The students want this.

So I was very, very appreciative of that kind of generosity. It's not even as though he talked for a long time. It's not as though he gave a lot of information, but he presented himself as who he was, without the stance of a teacher, without the stance of somebody in authority at all. He presented himself as a human who feels lost and is really trying to find a way that maybe has a possibility of working for him, maybe, and that was so important to me.

I'm just glad that they had visiting artists come—he actually came to the painters. So I'm glad I was able to be there, and I think there were only six or seven of us. Not that we picked his brain particularly, but it was a very memorable time.

MS. RICHARDS: Right. Were there any others like that, or not?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Nancy Graves came and did a talk as well. I don't know that her work affected me, but she and I became pretty close friends.

Dore Ashton came as well. And I have a hard time thinking about her lecture, but I think it had to do with Abstract Expressionism and that orientation, that belief. And I thought her very, very smart, and I became very close to Dore.

I also heard Noguchi speak. I don't think I drank anything from his work, although the work that I have seen—or the work that he showed, I didn't drink from. I'm not sure that I really got a lot out of him as a teacher. I'm not sure he was a particularly giving teacher.

I remember him saying pretty clearly that what he wanted was \$500 for that lecture, for the talk that he gave. And for me—this was in 1973—that seemed like \$50,000 or something—not that that matters, and of course, he has a right to ask for that. It just seemed like it was all about him, and so I didn't find that he helped me.

MS. RICHARDS: When you finally graduated, did you have in your mind at that point that you were an artist, and that that's what your life would be, and you'd find a studio and continue to work?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah. I never said it that way, but I knew that this was my life. But there's something else I want to say, if you could put that off.

[Audio break.]

An important person that came around to my studio from time to time for a year was Ronnie Bladen. That year was the first time that he ever taught students. So his approach to teaching was one of such deep respect toward the student. I can only say what he did with me.

I feel like some of the things that I showed him were really not a lot to show. They were clay pieces that were

put together in ways in which I would whack with a paddle to get some forms of what the model was doing. That was some of what I showed him. And the other things—actually, I did some sewn pieces with phallic things that were hanging out, and I would also Vac-u-form these things.

But he would look at them, giving it every chance. I could have been devastated so easily. I could have been mauled so easily. And when he came into the studio, he would be silent most of the time. I can't remember, really, any words that he said, but I can remember his deep respect for art. I can remember a kind of faith that he had in the possibilities of whatever I was showing him, and he would verbalize it very minimally. And it just made me swell with possibilities for myself, but it had to come from a person that was that humane and that knew how to interact with another artist.

He was kind of my stereotype of an artist, in that he never had breakfast, never had lunch except coffee, coffee, coffee, coffee. And then he had steak and french fries at night, drank a whole lot. He was skinny, skinny, skinny. And he built these big things that were so invasive for how shy this man was. His things were so—there was a logical form that was just outrageous [in a good way -UvR] in terms of the size or the scale.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And gentle, gentle, gentle, even when he took—he would take us out, and he would be really quite poor. He would treat us all to something, some glass of wine or—and just gentle, extremely kind.

And I know how well loved he was, because I saw him dying in the hospital. It was at Beekman Hospital downtown, a little bit downtown. He had a lineup of students—because he taught at Parsons—that were there. Some of them were massaging his old feet. He died of stomach cancer.

They probably kept him alive longer than they should have, but he was drawing right up until the last moment, planning pieces. And he had his Hollywood first wife that held his hand, and she'd sing him some of the songs that he knew from their younger days.

I'm not sure if he liked it or didn't like it, but he seemed pretty happy—because he had another wife then that was kind of trying to organize all these people that were trying to see him. And she was being very generous with sharing him.

In some weird ways it's almost like the makeup of the human was able to make a connection with me, rather than their work.

MS. RICHARDS: Did any of those teachers you had at Columbia end up serving as a model when you taught? We're not there yet to talk about that, but maybe you can think about that later.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't think so.

MS. RICHARDS: They just brought themselves—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think I have my own way of teaching. I don't know. I probably learned something from them, but I think my teaching, and my whole life, is like a real effort to try to have more faith in the things in me that maybe are not so fine, that maybe are not so good, that maybe are the things in me that might be more unspeakable.

I don't even know what all that means, but I'm trying still to fight that thing about being "good." That's the thing I want least to be. I want to be good; I want to be humane to others. I want to be humane—I am humane, I think—but I don't want to make my work like that of a good girl, I guess—a good girl. I don't want that.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, given that you do the kind of work you do, you've obviously given yourself permission to be free.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Not enough yet. Not enough yet. I've got a ways to go.

MS. RICHARDS: So, going to graduation—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: When you graduated, did you, at that point, stay in—that wasn't a Columbia apartment you were in—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: So you needed to move—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: —and find a place to work.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: I guess you imagined working and living in the same place, because you had a daughter you wanted to—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, I worked until the end of the summer, and then I got—

MS. RICHARDS: No, I mean when you looked for a place to live, were you looking for a place to live and work in the same place?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: You mean when I went first to Columbia University?

MS. RICHARDS: When you left.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: When I left Columbia University, that was a major thing for me to sort of break out really on my own. I got a letter at the end of the summer—because I was the only one that stayed the whole summer. I'm the only one that stayed the whole summer at Columbia because I used all their facilities. And I got this letter. [Laughs.] It was really a rigorous letter, saying, "You must leave"—

MS. RICHARDS: Vacate.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —vacate, yes—"by September the first," something like that, a week before school starts or whatever. And as it is, they were very generous to let me use [their metal shop -UvR] the entire summer. I had all the facilities to myself, which was fantastic.

So I then scurried and I had something like \$6,000 to my name, and I had lived on food stamps. My daughter and I lived on \$2,300 a year—

MS. RICHARDS: Wait, not—

[... -UvR]

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —and then \$180 of that—of the month, went to rent because Columbia University—the rent for me was just tremendous. Of course, it's fair, but for me it was tremendous. And I was able to get my daughter into the Riverside Nursery School for nine dollars a week. They were kind, kind, kind to me.

So we had food stamps and we were able to make it. So now, on my own, it was a little bit scary but, hey, I'm sort of used to poverty, so it doesn't really scare me. I had \$6,000 in the bank that I earned from all the teaching that I did, so I bought a loft. How they let me buy it, I have no idea, because there was no real board. This was 1975. There were just other people that owned the thing, and they said, "But you don't have any income. How are you going to pay the [monthly maintenance -UvR]?"

MS. RICHARDS: Were they artists, though?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: They were artists too, but, "How [are you going to pay the maintenance]?"

MS. RICHARDS: What was the address?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Spring Street and Sixth Avenue, the second floor. It's the southeast corner. Two thousand three hundred square feet I got for \$6,000.

My first job was to work for Robert Blackburn printmaking workshop doing some archival stuff, sort of organizing their [prints -UvR]. Then I got a job working for a Title VI program, which was for senior citizens that we would feed in St. Malachi's church. The senior citizens would be fed, and the homeless people would be fed. There would be huge lines of people that would come to receive that.

And I did something with food stamps [for senior citizens -UvR]. I was really bad at all the governmental [bureaucratic stuff -UvR], because it was so frustrating and so impossible, but I was really kind to the people. And one of the things I did is I carried a basket with me throughout Times Square.

Times Square, now this is 1976, was full of empty lots, abandoned buildings with druggies shooting up, hotels with a lot of SRO—single room occupancy—people in there.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Full of porno stuff. So, anyway, I went around with this basket of food for people that couldn't get out of their room. They were older people, and they're almost all actors and actresses that live in that area.

So when I'd deliver the food to them—it was pathetic food. It was Wonder Bread with a slice of margarine on it, and I would [bring a canned fruit cup and some not-so-tasty turkey loaf -UvR]—

Anyway, so it wasn't so much the food, but they were so happy to see a human being, and a human being who would sit down and talk to them, because they couldn't get out of their room. And many of them were mugged, because that neighborhood was so awful.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And once you get mugged when you're old, it's kind of all over. It's like killing that person.

So I would leave them the food, but I would see on their walls a history of their lives that were quite amazing sometimes, of the plays that they had been in and of the dancing they had done, or of the singing that—they all have these amazing photographs, these amazing lives. Anyway, I did that, I guess, for about a year, year and a half. It gave me huge headaches because of how sad it all was.

So then there was something called Title VII CETA [Comprehensive Employment and Training Act].

MS. RICHARDS: Right. C-E-T-A, right?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. And it was for people who made under \$4,500—artists whose income was under \$4,500 a year.

So when I went back to that, I felt like I was in high school again [... -UvR].

MS. RICHARDS: Slovin.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: [Rochelle -UvR] Slovin. She was the head of it [New York City CETA Artists Project]. [Laughs.] She was so teeny and so cute and so smart. But she was like Miss High-Up-There, and we were all slobs. [Laughs.] Struggling slobs. So, anyway, the jobs I got over there were so pathetic.

I was supposed to go to the Bronx to somebody who was the head of some neighborhood something-or-other. And when I got there, off the subway, I looked around and it reminded me of the bombed-out buildings [as far as my eyes could see -UvR] that I saw as a kid. Piles of bricks, windows that were chewed out of the place like there were some kind of animals that would eat around the frames, so the frame that was square at one time, rectangle, is no longer that.

And then there were all these homeless guys that were warming their hands on these barrels. And I thought, Geez, why am I here, I wonder? So I finally get to this address of this place, and there's this guy, who must be all of 20, 21 years old, that was straightening rusty nails on the linoleum floor. That was the director himself. [Laughs.]

So he says to me, "Well, we have this big pile of tires. Why don't you do a sculpture out of the tires?" And then he showed me all the [piled-up bricks -UvR] with the cement in between [crumbling off -UvR]—

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —that's still clinging onto it.

So I left, and I'm glad that I was able to leave that, because I thought to myself, You think I'm coming out here with my toolbox? [Laughs.]

So I didn't do it, but to Rochelle's credit, we did do something called the *Mylar Lagoon*, which was an artwork that had Mylar on it. It was supposed to have wind that never came. We stretched Mylar across a lagoon, me and two other artists—Marjorie Portnow and [Germaine -UvR] Keller. The piece was not a great piece, but we had fun doing it. We were allowed to use rentals, vans, that were charged to CETA, and they paid us a salary of \$10,000 a year, which was heaven sent. And I had that for two years. So I worked and I worked and I worked. I had studio time. It was like a grant. It was marvelous.

MS. RICHARDS: And your daughter was in school.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: My daughter was in school, exactly.

MS. RICHARDS: She was in a different school downtown at that point.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: She went to a public school, and it was so awful. I used to try to teach at it to try to—you can't—I couldn't shore it up. It was just chaos.

MS. RICHARDS: Which school was it, do you remember?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It was just off of Sixth Avenue and 11th Street, I think. It was a public school. I think it's a good school now because the parents have really conquered it and shored it up.

MS. RICHARDS: Right, I think that's—yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: But at that time, it wasn't. So I got her into Little Red Schoolhouse, which was marvelous. They had fantastic teachers. She got a whole scholarship.

MS. RICHARDS: So what was your working situation like there on Sixth Avenue?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Then I had a loft—Sixth Avenue—

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —I had a loft. It was glorious. It was just glorious. I had a whole room in which I did all of my machine stuff—

MS. RICHARDS: Now, you were still working with steel?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, no, no.

MS. RICHARDS: Talk about the transition—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Now I'm [working with] wood.

MS. RICHARDS: —where you started to work with wood.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Okay.

At the very end of my stay at Columbia University, there was a guy by the name of Michael Mulhern, who was a monk, who was also a fellow student—very, very kind, wonderful human being, who bought me some four-by-four cedar beams.

MS. RICHARDS: Why?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I remember why, because I actually—he saw it on sale—and I might have even said to him that I need cedar, and he probably knew that I couldn't really afford it, so he got it for me. And he was also the same person that helped renovate my loft later, as he was easing out of the monastery, because he no longer wanted to be there.

But I was working at that time with furnace pipes that were full of rust, that I also used in connection with these clay logs. They would sort of fall off in different directions, these clay logs that I would make almost a grid-like structure on the floor. I did this for my last show at Columbia University, at that enormous building—it's got this big, big dome on it. Anyway, it was a wonderfully spacious exhibition space.

And then I wanted to use the same pipes to put in between some sort of wood, because what it would mean is that I could get these high wooden beams that I ground with these pipes in between low pipes—and it would enable something to stand that made sense. They were different heights, maybe a little bit like the fingers, but they were straight up. And that was my first piece in cedar, and that the cedar would skirt, skirt, skirt on both sides.

MS. RICHARDS: The steel.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: The cedar—the cedar. The steel would not. The steel would just be a regular pipe that went through here and here and here.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, in between.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. And then on the outside of the cedar I would just glue on a little—like a large shim that would be on either side. Just to make it stand, because it wouldn't stand otherwise. But it looked much better to have some organic thing.

And then when I started grinding it, I thought, Oh, my God, that it's so soft, because [only -UvR] the growth rings themselves are hard—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —but what's in between is almost like cotton. It was so soft, and I could make it sensuous and organic, and it had a pink look to it, so that there was a kind of fleshy look.

MS. RICHARDS: You never thought about working in clay. I don't think there were too many artists—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I did, and I have worked with clay, but it drives me nuts because it's so droopy. It doesn't really—there isn't a hard enough thing going.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you had your loft on Spring Street, you were working in cedar. Do you recall how your ideas were developing in those years before you had any—well, you had work in a show, I think, pretty soon after that. But you did a piece called *For Weston*—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: —in 1978.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: I don't know if that's one of your first substantial pieces.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Weston was one of the people that I took care of at St. Malachi's church, when I did that job—an older guy that got sick and I used to visit in the hospital.

MS. RICHARDS: The piece is slightly figurative. You can imagine these forms huddled together.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's interesting that you say that.

MS. RICHARDS: They look like shrouded forms huddled together, I mean in a reproduction. One could imagine them as strange boulders—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: —or strange tree trunks.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: But my first impression was they were human forms huddled.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right.

Anyway, it was one of my first pieces that would undulate—the surface would undulate in a way. They had to be very particularly put together. When the sun would set in my studio and hit it from the side, hit the *For Weston* piece, it kind of took my breath away as to the possibilities of that sensuous movement.

Of course, I'm cheating, right? When you have the sun shine on something in a certain way, you can make almost anything gorgeous, gorgeous, gorgeous. So I'm not saying I'm responsible for the gorgeous look, but I'm just saying that it did bring out possibilities for me for the future.

MS. RICHARDS: You're talking about the sensuousness, the surface, the forms. There were very few artists who were involved in those kinds of issues at that time.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's right.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel that you were really working in kind of isolation, or were there other kindred spirits you knew of?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah, but I've never been a part of a group. That's not to say that I didn't drink a lot from a lot of artists, including the Minimalists. But the Minimalists always felt to me as though—I don't know, it was like these people who know the truth—I'm being very harsh—that they know the right way; they know the right philosophy; and they're clean of any emotion. And they're kind of scary to me.

They all seem smart, but not in a way I necessarily like smartness. It seemed like a smartness that had too much certainty about it. And I found their work to be one formula after another, that it wasn't like wandering

into a place that's really frightening, or that, I don't know, it didn't feel like courage, what they were doing. And it certainly didn't feel as though—it was even free of any sex.

MS. RICHARDS: You must have known Mark di Suvero's work at that point.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Of course, he was taking from various areas, but there was more of what you're talking about, I guess, in his work. He wouldn't have been called a Minimalist, I don't think.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right. Right.

MS. RICHARDS: And were you—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I was crazy about Sol LeWitt—do you know what I mean? As a human being.

MS. RICHARDS: Are any Arte Povera artists showing in New York at that time?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't think I saw the Arte Povera until sometime later. I don't know if they were. I admire their honesty tremendously too.

MS. RICHARDS: I was thinking of that sensibility and the use of the basic materials and—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, and it's not high art—

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —like they deliberately—

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —get off the pedestal like I thought the Minimalists were on. But what I'm saying are just huge generalities.

MS. RICHARDS: Of course.

So as your work was developing—I've read that *The Song of a Saint* characterizes your first mature work. Would you talk about that work and how it came to be, if, in fact—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's the Artpark piece—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: *Saint Eulalia*, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, that's right. That was in Lewiston, New York. It looks like it was a mammoth undertaking—180 carved posts, or cut posts—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It was.

MS. RICHARDS: —installed probably by yourself.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I had two guys that actually did the—

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —with a post-hole digger, that did that.

MS. RICHARDS: That's good.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel, at the time when you made that, that it was some kind of breakthrough, that in some way, whether it was the scale of it or—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't know. I don't feel breakthroughs.

MS. RICHARDS: —or the context that—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Like I don't feel a breakthrough now. I remember sitting next to Harry Cobb [ph] the other night—and he must be 82 or something—and he says, "I'm waiting for my epiphany." I thought, How great, but I also wanted to tell him, "Harry, I think you've had a few epiphanies in your life already," but I didn't want to correct him either.

Periodically, when I'm doing a piece, I feel this real sense of excitement. That doesn't always mean that this will be a good piece, but sometimes it does. And that sense of excitement isn't there all the time.

What drives me is trying to get there. Will this look the way I want it to look? I'm not even that clear on the way I want it to look. What will this look like? It's that wanting to know where it can go, where it can still go. That's what keeps one going, because while you're building these things, they don't look like anything, you know?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: You can't—you're reacting to what's there, but really it's not—

MS. RICHARDS: It's an intuitive process, it seems.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It's a real intuitive process.

But getting back to the schools—I don't want to say that I am from no school, but I think I'm from no school. And in some ways I would be more proud if I were from no school. But that's a silly thing to say. But I do feel that I've been alone, that I—

MS. RICHARDS: Well, you think of someone like Louise Bourgeois—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: She's on her own—totally on her own.

MS. RICHARDS: —and yet her work speaks to so many different times—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: —and places—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: —generations of artists, and the public, of course.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: So you could think about her.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: She's also a person who's had a great influence on me. She really sort of points to the part in your body that hurts the most, and does it so well.

MS. RICHARDS: Completely fearless.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And full of fear.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Driven by fear.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever meet her?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I invited her to Yale to talk. She was 70-something, and she was just passionately talking about the affair of the governess with her father, like it hurt still. I'm standing there thinking, You should write your father a thank-you letter and the governess too. Look what's it's done. Look how long it's mobilized you for—and continued to mobilize her—

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —until her death.

MS. RICHARDS: She told the same story.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: But it's not just that story. I think it's maybe a number of other stories, but this was one of the main stories. And it just is a testament to a child's ability to drink things like that in a way that's huge, and

imbue their entire psyches with it.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Which is so cruel, but also so remarkable. So I think she has—I've admired her a lot.

MS. RICHARDS: As you were working through the late '70s, at one point in '79, maybe and '80, you traveled to Italy. I don't know if that was two trips, or one trip that lasted a long time.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It was two trips.

MS. RICHARDS: Two trips. Could you talk about those trips—if they were important, and what you took away from those?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think the first—

MS. RICHARDS: Were those your first main trips to Europe?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, they were.

MS. RICHARDS: In your life? That was the first time you'd been to Europe?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, that's right.

MS. RICHARDS: So you may have gone elsewhere besides Italy.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think I wanted to see everything Giotto ever did, so I did.

MS. RICHARDS: That was your itinerary, Giotto?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: All his murals. That was my itinerary, right.

MS. RICHARDS: What about going to any other locations?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I went to Florence; I went to—

MS. RICHARDS: And did you go alone?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. And I stayed with people—

MS. RICHARDS: With your daughter?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, my daughter was with somebody at the time. Well, not with somebody, but she was with her grandmother.

MS. RICHARDS: So this was a study trip.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, it was a trip where. I have an agenda that was just so instinctively drawn up. There was no real plan except where all of Giotto's things were. I'm all alone, so I really open my eyes. I don't have to converse with anybody. I don't have to shoot the [breeze]. I don't have to get off focus. So they were invaluable. They were marvelous, both of those trips.

MS. RICHARDS: What was it about Giotto's work, above all other artists, that drew you to him?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: He had it all. He's loaded with emotion, but in a way that is so contained. It's fenced in so beautifully with his—with the shrouds that he puts on his saints or Marys or—but also with these—

MS. RICHARDS: You're motioning on—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, the—

MS. RICHARDS: —head garments.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's right, the profile of lines they often have at the edge of the head garments that go over the forehead and down, and that within this he would pack it with emotion that seemed—there was no mischief in it. It was devotion, real devotion.

Now we can poke at it, but in those days when he was doing it, I don't think he could. They would do things sometimes like get some high-up cardinal or something in hell, you know what I mean? It almost seems so

obvious.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you meet any other artists, Italian artists, when you were on that trip?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No. Somebody by the name of Bart Wasserman, but he never became an artist, or he thought he was an artist, but he wasn't. I stayed with him for a little bit.

MS. RICHARDS: Had you been yearning to make that trip for a long time, or was that more—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I made a trip before that to Mexico, which was a very important one. I think that might have been '79, '80, something like that.

MS. RICHARDS: This was '79, '80 when you went to—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: To Italy.

MS. RICHARDS: —Italy.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I might have made one before that, then, to Mexico.

MS. RICHARDS: And what was the destination of that trip?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: To see all of the ruins. It might have been '78. It was a time when tickets cost practically nothing, and you could stay at places that were a dollar a night. It was a great trip. I did that with a friend named Roberta Allen, who was a writer. And we saw—

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: How long was that trip?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —Chichén Itzá.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember—

[End of Track.]

[In progress]—how long that trip was?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think it was about two weeks. And we went to Guatemala as well. Rode in one of those buses where the bus driver pulls on [... -UvR] his grandmother[is long pigtail ... -UvR]. It was a great trip.

MS. RICHARDS: When you came back from Italy, was there an immediate impact on your work in any way?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No. I don't think there ever is for me. I think it shows itself up when I'm not even aware of it.

I'll tell you what I did take from Guatemala. I dug into some of those chests that they have, full of rags. And I pulled out some pretty amazing [very cheap -UvR] weavings. I still have them at home, and I still enjoy them every day. I framed them and I look at them. So I took whatever fabrics I could. They were beautiful weavings that were kind of torn up, but still, what was left was beautiful. See, my life is getting better. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: When you came back—we don't have to talk about everything—there was Art on the Beach, and there were other things, but you were doing some freelance—you were doing some adjunct teaching, SVA [School of Visual Arts], other places. But if we move up to 1982, how did you end up being offered the job, the teaching job, at Yale?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I applied, I think, along with, I don't know, 400 other people; I applied.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there any person at Yale who knew your work who you felt made a special pitch for you?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I'm not sure, but the dean at the time was Andrew Forge, for whom I have a tremendous amount of respect. And oddly enough, he's a man who wanted more than anything to be a great—a really great artist. And he was a great writer. He did some beautiful [writing -UvR], don't you think?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: The books that he wrote? And whenever he wrote me a memo, I would just swoon, it was so well written.

And he, too, was one of those people who had such respect—very, very different from [Ronald Bladen -UvR]. Having a very careful way of relating to people, a very considerate way of relating to people.

MS. RICHARDS: When you started teaching—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: He was very smart, very gentle, very smart.

When I started teaching there?

MS. RICHARDS: Was that a full-time teaching job?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So you moved—that means you moved to New Haven?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, they wanted me to move to New Haven, but my daughter was then 13 years old and she was in New York City. So I would often teach Monday—I would leave early in the morning, seven o'clock train. Come back at night; be with her Monday night. And then teach again on Tuesday and then go back for Wednesday morning—I still had Wednesday to do. But sometimes I would not come back Monday night, but I would come back Tuesday night, or one or the other I would come back.

MS. RICHARDS: What were you teaching?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I was teaching in the school of art and architecture—sculpture—both the graduate students and the undergraduate students.

MS. RICHARDS: What was your approach to teaching?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I tried very much to feel into the work of the student I was speaking to, to try to figure out the intentions of that work, to try to figure out where that student—given what that student said in the work, given what that student is verbally saying, I try to figure out what the options are that might be more interesting than what they're doing, maybe. And then try and give them some options, but doing it very gently.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you enjoy teaching?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I did.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you fearful at all of how much time it would take from the studio? Or actually, you were already—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Terribly fearful.

MS. RICHARDS: You were already working and taking the time.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No. Because three days of teaching—and this was really real teaching that I took very seriously, because I identified with the students, and they really wanted what you gave them. I gave a lot. And then I would come back—by that time I had a place on South Fifth Street in Brooklyn.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, so when did you—you mean living-working or just working?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. I just worked on South Fifth Street, and I was there for 24 years in Brooklyn.

MS. RICHARDS: When did you get the South Fifth Street studio?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I got that in 1981. So when I came back from teaching, on Wednesday, Thursday, I would try to make that space, build it so that it could be a functional space, because what was there was a factory that made burlap bags and it was a real, real mess. There were no windows. There weren't—it was a mess. So I tried very hard to get—

MS. RICHARDS: You were renting that space?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No. I bought it.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, okay. Because otherwise you wouldn't invest in—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's right.

MS. RICHARDS: When you bought that space—I know Judy Pfaff had a studio below you.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you own it together, or you rented it to her?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, I didn't rent it to her. She owned her floor and I owned mine, and then the next people owned theirs.

MS. RICHARDS: Great. That was a huge step for you—it must have been—to buy that.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It was a huge step, because this was a much, much bigger space. And the space was actually no longer the place where I lived. It was another place.

MS. RICHARDS: And you liked that?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, I do like it, because—you can only inhale so much cedar and live. So I liked it.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you also like the sense of leaving where you lived and going to a workplace?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I do. I do.

MS. RICHARDS: Is there a sense of a working atmosphere more than you might have felt if you were working where you lived?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I worked where I lived because that's all I could afford, and my daughter was there. But once she got of an age where I didn't have to quite be with her all the time—I need such a huge setup where I work. I don't want to live where I work, because it's not clean. It's not homey. [Laughs.] It's really a workplace.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And I am the type that—the visuals, the things I have in front of me—like I'll have black paint on a brush, and I'm working on a piece and I'm finished with that one piece that I intended the black paint to be for. And then I look around the whole studio and say, Well, what else needs black paint—because I have it with me. Or if I have a hammer, it's like the same mentality: What am I going to bang? I've got this hammer.

So this definitely has the taste of work in it, and everything about it says that.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And I never move things from the office into the [studio space -UvR]—even into this room, which [is my drawing space -UvR].

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. We haven't gotten here yet. We're still on Fifth Street in Brooklyn.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, I know. [Laughs.] Okay. I'm sorry.

MS. RICHARDS: No, no, no. So we won't get confused.

So you built your studio, but then in 1982, you started teaching at Yale full-time. And as you said, you enjoyed it and it was rewarding, but it was difficult because it took you away so much from the studio.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel that in that period of time—you were teaching at Yale, what, for four or five years?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, I think more than that. Maybe six years.

MS. RICHARDS: Until '87?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Was it?

MS. RICHARDS: I read '86 and I read '87—'82, '83, '84, '85, '86—so five—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Sounds good.

MS. RICHARDS: —academic years, five academic years.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Sounds good. Sounds good.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel that it contributed something to your work?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't think it contributed something to my work. I do think I developed as a teacher, and I think those are really different things. At the end of the time that I was teaching there, I felt—because I had some projects that I had brought up that the students did really well with; I would present them to the students. And if I was presenting them a second time and third time in the following years, I would say to myself, Ursula, if you say this one more time, just take a bullet and shoot yourself in the head.

So it—after a time, it began to lose its allure, or its interest.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you enjoy being in the academic milieu, being part of the school?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I enjoyed the library enormously. I would hang out at the stacks. I would have a desk there. And it was all about finding the book you want. There were certain things about Poland that I needed, so I got a general area. And I would look at some of the bridges that they built or some of the ways in which things were anchored or whatever. [The books -UvR] were so rich; they were so marvelous.

And I did take a course from a woman who taught about Peruvian fabrics. It was marvelous, because they know so much about fabrics, about weaving and about [the long ago past of fabrics in that part of the world -UvR].

And I mourned that I wasn't there when Louis Kahn was there.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you ever wanted to weave?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No.

MS. RICHARDS: Sometimes fabric makes it—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I knit a sweater once. I knit—

MS. RICHARDS: Well, you said you sew.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —like a crazy woman for 24 hours. I knit like, straight, because I hated to do it so much, I did [it] throughout the night. And then it ended up being without sleeves, because I just couldn't bear it anymore. It really is boring.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] Yeah, yeah. People do it while they're doing other things. I understand when you were at Yale, though, you met your husband.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I did.

MS. RICHARDS: Your second husband.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I did.

MS. RICHARDS: Can you tell me a little about that—how you met?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: There's a woman by the name of Ann Gibson, who started teaching at the same time that I did at Yale. She taught in the art history department. I think she came from Stony Brook [University]. And we sometimes, not often, but sometimes used to travel on the train together. And we used to talk about the possibility of getting something together—some kind of a living situation together so that we wouldn't have to pay rent, because we had to [stay in New Haven two nights a week -UvR].

MS. RICHARDS: You mean in New Haven to avoid the commute?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Correct. No, no. Not just to avoid the commute, but—we were paying rent while we were staying in New Haven. And we thought if we can get something—and neither one of us had any money, so I don't really know what we were talking about. But we thought in case there was some tremendous deal somewhere—

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, to buy something together.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: To buy something, right, right.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: So she ended up renting from my husband, whose wife left him. He had a pretty decent-sized house, so he was renting out to faculty members. She ended up renting a bedroom from my husband—my present husband. And she brought me home one day. So—

MS. RICHARDS: And the rest is history.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I got the house and the man. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So you met, and he was doing what at Yale?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: He was in the medical [school -UvR], and he had a laboratory there, and he was doing [biomedical -UvR] research. He's a biochemist. He does research on how the brain functions, and that's what he was trying to figure out at that time. I think he was there for 24 years.

MS. RICHARDS: What caused you to stop teaching at Yale?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I resigned. It was really a hard thing for me to do, because one of the things I couldn't believe is how it is that I was even asked to teach at Yale, and here I am quitting it. But obviously, what the call was is my work—my art work. And I started to sell. It wasn't any kind of a guarantee to survive on sales. But also, after I met my husband, then it was really possible, because there was another paycheck coming in—that made it really possible.

MS. RICHARDS: I think even while you were at Yale, you were doing some substantial work—somehow, doing all that. And you had a show—when was it? Let's see—

[Audio break.]

I was saying you were doing a lot of work, even though you were teaching. And in fact, you received a Guggenheim in 1983—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: —which must have been incredibly gratifying.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It was wonderful, wonderful.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there a particular project for which you applied for that grant? I don't know if it worked that way.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It's so weird. I just wrote that I would be using—I think I wrote two sentences. And one of them said, "I will be using"—or, "Should I get the funding, I would be using it to continue my work." So, very trusting, whomever it is that gave it.

MS. RICHARDS: And you did a piece in 1983 which I wanted to ask you about. It's kind of unusual. It's called *Tunnels on the Levee*—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: —with three huge cuts in the earth.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah, in the levee. Dayton, Ohio.

MS. RICHARDS: How did that come about? And how did you conceive of that piece? Was that your first public commission?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. It wasn't really a commission. The funding was so low. I had to cheat. I had to make the sides of those tunnels so thin and then just thicker at the front—

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] To fake it.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —and thicker in the back. It was so—

MS. RICHARDS: Does it still exist?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: But I did it all alone. This was way before assistants. And no, it doesn't exist. I think they must have taken it down a long time ago. But it was kind of—talk about not being a good girl. I mean, I'm cutting through those levees. Those levees, presumably, are meant to prevent flooding or something.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: So I think I'm shedding some things by now—by that year.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah. Probably, obviously. Did you feel that it was a positive experience—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: —even though it wasn't very well paying?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It was good. And it was—one side was open, of that tunnel, and the rest was closed off. So you could see—there was like appendages, organic appendages, in there. You could see them from here, but most of all, how the sun would shine on them at the top, the open part.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the reason an artist was commissioned to do work there?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't know. There was this young, energetic woman who just got the artist. And involving practically no money and—I don't even know. It must have been the city of Dayton that sponsored it. City Beautiful Project, something like that.

MS. RICHARDS: But it doesn't look like it's really in the city.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No. But I think it might be actually in the city, but not in the heart of the city. I think there were a lot of gardens around there.

MS. RICHARDS: Another question before you get back into the development of your work. Nineteen eighty-five, you took a trip to Poland. I guess it was the first trip. And I read somewhere that you had actually applied for and received some kind of travel grant in 1975 to go.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: For [a] Fulbright.

MS. RICHARDS: A Fulbright, that's right. But didn't go, because of political, technical reasons.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: They never answered me until after I graduated. By that time, I had bought a loft.

MS. RICHARDS: I see.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It would have screwed up a whole lot of other things in terms of my livelihood. They were just having such a hard time, because it was a communist country. And some of the things that they were proposing, like my working in the hallway with a lot of other students, was just—really, I couldn't do that. It sounded like it might have been a student-like situation, but I don't know. It would have actually been really good for me to just go and see Poland then.

MS. RICHARDS: So you continued for 10 more years—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —before I did that.

MS. RICHARDS: —wanting to go.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the reason that you wanted to go so much?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, I just wanted to go, because—I know it seems really weird, but I feel Polish. But when I go to Poland—I am so American that it's—not me, because everybody just knows it the moment they set their eyes on me.

So I don't really belong there, but somehow who I think I am—and maybe I'm just kind of making this up—has to do with that country. But it has to do with a fantasy I have of that country. I've never lived in that country. I wasn't even born there. So it's not as though I have any kind of understanding from it that has anything to do with reality. It's little bits I heard from my parents. But somehow their notions and their attitudes can disseminate pretty easily. Not that they're so verbal—neither one of them are very verbal—but you can feel things from them.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there anything going on in the art world in Poland that drew you there also, that you wanted to see?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think the most important things for me were the world of the vernacular—that is, the vernacular architecture. The oldest buildings I could find—and it's not like the old town in Warsaw, because that's already so commercialized. It's been rebuilt after World War II, but it's so prettified, for the people to come enjoy it.

So I would wander more to the rural areas—the small villages, to the most primitive villages I could. To places where they still wove the barn roofs out of the same stuff that those shoes were woven out of that's on top of that red [Chinese cabinet -UvR].

MS. RICHARDS: Willow?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And I think the most moving thing that happened to me is being sung to by these peasants, having them sing to me. I had friends that were at the Ujazdowski Contemporary Art Museum or Center [Centre for Contemporary Art, Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw]. It's—Ujazdowski, Zamek Ujazdowski. It's like the castle, Ujazdowski. It used to be used by one of the kings, I guess, as a summer resort—

MS. RICHARDS: This is in Warsaw.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —in Warsaw. And they helped take me around to people. The director [Wojciech Krukowski -UvR] helped take me around to people that would sing to me. Can you imagine?

MS. RICHARDS: Why?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Why did I meet them?

MS. RICHARDS: Why? Did you know about the singing and asked to hear it?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I didn't know anything. I just knew I wanted to be sung to by Polish peasants. But it had to be their regional songs. It couldn't be—"Kumbaya," you know what I mean? It had to be the songs that they [felt were historically theirs -UvR].

MS. RICHARDS: This is something that you remembered from when you were—your mother—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: —because you hadn't been there, of course.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I just know that at night when I would come home, I would have this little itty-bitty room that was above the old town [in Warsaw -UvR], with a window that was like this.

MS. RICHARDS: Circular window.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And I just remember my cheeks burning at night, and I couldn't go to sleep. Obviously, it had some tremendous meaning for me.

MS. RICHARDS: Was your mother still alive—1985?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: What did she think about your trip?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't think she thought much of it. I don't think they would possibly understand why I would need to do this. I don't even understand it.

But I know that I also had a conversation with one of them—one of the farmers. We were sitting on a used car seat, the kind you pull out of a car. And he put it inside the garden. And we were just talking. He's telling me about his brother in Chicago. And he can barely remember the street, but he's not really saying [the street name -UvR] so that I can understand it, because it's English that he's saying the street name [in, the way a peasant Pole would distort it -UvR].

And I'm just talking to this man [in the middle of his own vegetable garden -UvR]—this gentle, gentle man. And I just feel like, This is a part of me. That this is somehow—that this should be happening to me, and it feels so familiar, and it feels so good, and it feels so safe.

And he's telling me his brother's name, because—in case I run into him. So there's no concept of the United States—

MS. RICHARDS: Were you speaking Polish?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. There's no concept of the United States—of how many people there are here—

MS. RICHARDS: How far Chicago is from New York.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —how far Chicago is.

There was one woman who sang to me—and all these women that sang to me are all older women. The younger women aren't that interested in that. And she sang to me, again, one of her songs. I taped all of these. I don't even know if the tapes are worth [anything, if the recordings are still audible. -UvR].

But she then goes with her hand. And the hands—their hands are all like my parents. They have thick fingers, and they almost can't straighten them out because they're so used to working, to having them curved in a certain position, and it's all calluses here. So she takes the cat with this hand, and she gently—because it was doing mischief or it was going onto a coffee table—she was very, very gently pushing it off. I had a hard time not crying because of the gentleness of that movement, of that motion.

So things get stimulated, but you don't know how. Just like I knew that trip was going to be [about -UvR] singing to me. That's what that trip was—the singing. And those are the riches that I would take back from that trip. And I'm hugely rich. I've never done it again, because somehow I can't do it now. I don't know why I can't. My trips are not like that. And it makes me sad. I don't know if it's a part of growing—having a career that's more intense or growing older. I don't know what it is.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean why you don't want to go back to Poland, or why you don't want to take any other trip?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No. I would go back to Poland. I would go back. I will go back. And I've been to the Ukraine. I don't know what the year was, maybe 10 years ago or something like that.

But to go to a country—and you can't possibly plan who's going to sing to you. You go into a town, and then you talk to a priest, maybe. The priest knows everybody in town, and he knows who sings. And you tell him what kind of singing you want. And then if he's an extraordinary priest, he'll take you there. Most of them are not, so you make your own way there. And to introduce yourself, it's often embarrassing, right? So it's much better to have somebody with you.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you have to explain why you want them to sing to you?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, that's just it. The people that were with me—he was like the—Wojciech Kurkowski, who was the director of [the Centre for Contemporary Art, Ujazdowski Castle -UvR].

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —he still is the director of the Ujazdowski Castle. He used to come, actually, and visit me here in New York City all the time. But [Wojciech -UvR] would explain it to them. And Wojciech, you can't refuse. You just can't refuse him, because he is so not only tender, but so smart. You can tell he's just elegant and educated. Who can refuse him? Especially a farmer or—

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And that then they just feel so privileged that somebody would take a trip to ask them to sing, like they didn't know their voices were that good.

MS. RICHARDS: Is this singing dying out? And in fact—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think it is.

MS. RICHARDS: —someone in Poland—some museum—might want your recordings?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, no. I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: They do their own.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think that they have much more expert people that record in a much better way than I did.

MS. RICHARDS: So they recognize that this is something that's going and that they want to capture, record?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, I don't know. I don't know if they do.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back to your work. When was it—and it might have been around this time; we're talking about the trip in '85, when you're starting to apply graphite to the surface of your work?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's a good question. I think one of the pieces—I don't know what I called it, but they were three boxes that had openings at the top.

MS. RICHARDS: There's something called *Three Boxes*.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And it's about the time—there's something—

MS. RICHARDS: And that's 1986.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It's about the time that I had a show at the Cranbrook Art Museum? Is that the—

MS. RICHARDS: I don't have a note of that. So it might have been in 1986. How did that material come to you, and what were you thinking about when you decided to start using it?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think that raw wood is too pretty, often, and I needed to beat it up some. You can't really beat up cedar because cedar doesn't beat up right. Some woods beat up much better than others—because, again, the growth rings have such a soft [material -UvR] in between. It doesn't carve well. Cedar carves terribly.

MS. RICHARDS: So what I'm gathering is that you had been searching, even maybe unconsciously—were you searching for something that would add that roughing-up to your work? And you came across graphite?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, I was—yeah. I was searching also for something that would not disguise the wood, because I think you can always feel the wood being there, but that would take away stuff that feels too nostalgic, too grain-oriented. Oh, this is—

[Audio break.]

MS. RICHARDS: You were saying that you were looking for something.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, that—yes.

MS. RICHARDS: The graphite.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: The graphite would make the wood psychologically do more of what I wanted it to do. It would come closer to not being wood, not being identified as wood and not having the thoughts about how pretty wood is. That it would be more my definition of what wood can be, in emotional terms.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you discover it?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's a good question, and I can't remember.

MS. RICHARDS: That's interesting. It's such an important part of your process.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: It would be interesting to remember, figure out how it came into your mind, if you had seen—in a dream, in someone else's work, in an art supply store. Did you see some powdered graphite and think, Oh, that's what I'll use?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I wish I could tell you. I just can't remember.

MS. RICHARDS: When you started using it, did you immediately—did it take awhile to figure out how you would need to apply it? I know how you do it now.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, no. How to apply the graphite is so, so simple. In fact, I think, technically, a lot of the stuff that I do is very simple.

MS. RICHARDS: So you immediately knew you'd use a brush and you would put it on?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, yeah. But you also have to have the spray 3M—the spray glue—but just a little bit, because it's mostly alcohol. And then I would put the powder on, but I would put it on [in] a way so that I grind it in with a brush, so that there's hardly any brush left by the time I get through with the—

MS. RICHARDS: It must be a very tough bristle brush.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It's a bristle brush, but it's not tough at all. [The bristles just cut themselves off -UvR] as you use it. There's hardly any brush left in it.

MS. RICHARDS: Are there different grades of graphite that you select from for different pieces?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, yes. But there are also different colors—any gradation from gray to darker-than-night black.

MS. RICHARDS: Right. Depending on—just like graphite pencils—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, that's right.

MS. RICHARDS: —the amount of graphite.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's right. And then maybe sometimes even, on a simple piece, I can use two different tones.

MS. RICHARDS: So you use different types of graphite on different pieces?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, that's right. But even on the same piece sometimes I can use a couple of tones. But it's not like painting. [I'm] not that conscious about it, because I don't want it to look—well, all of the areas that recede need the darker graphite, and all the areas that come out need lighter, and less. I don't want it to become formulaic. I'm afraid of that, and I'm trying to fight it.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember at that time—so we're up to about the mid-'80s. You've been working with cedar for 10 years. Can you describe, if you remember, the evolution of how you worked with it? I guess I'm talking about physically how you work with it—if that evolved, or if it was simply a matter of getting it to do what you wanted it to do, and what you wanted to do was evolving. Does that make sense?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: [Pauses.] I knew I wanted it to move, but in those days I didn't want it to move as dramatically as some of my pieces move now. Although the piece that I'm working on now, at the present time—really, the boards make their transitions pretty smoothly, so the movement on the surface is not so dramatic, even though the external forms will be fairly dramatic. They're kind of mountainous in the shapes that they'll finally take. I think I had a softer touch then. I was more gentle with the grinders, with the circular saw.

MS. RICHARDS: Would you say more tentative?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Maybe—maybe.

MS. RICHARDS: You're so experienced now, you must have a surety about what you do.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah. And I'm scared of that, too, my having been with it so long that I'm so familiar. But I'm grateful that it's constantly revealing things to me that I don't know yet and that I am able to push my cutters in different ways with different pieces.

MS. RICHARDS: In those early years, you, of course, were doing everything yourself.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I did everything myself—

MS. RICHARDS: Did you—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —including the cutting.

MS. RICHARDS: So thinking of the complex process that you have now, even for smaller—relatively small—pieces, did that process evolve fairly early in the time you were using the cedar? The layering, the gluing, the screwing, the cutting—I'm not saying it in the right order—or were you developing the process as you were making the pieces, and different pieces would call for different solutions, and you would find—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think the latter is probably more correct, because at the beginning, I remember sometimes making passageways that aren't simply on the floor, but that would curve. But the thing that tantalized me, or the thing that interested me, is what these cuts would look like next to one another as it made a passage.

Many of them were actually—I cut wedges. And at that time, I did things in such a primitive way. I would cut these wedges out with a circular saw, and I would get them to fit with one another, and I would glue them wedge by wedge by wedge, and maybe make a comb that would be kind of organic after I ground it. And I would make maybe an edge, a top edge, of that comb very vulnerable, very thin. So it wasn't really horizontal piling, a lot of that. Even the *For Weston* piece that you mentioned has to do with those organic wedges that are clustered on top of one another with the wood going up vertically.

The beautiful thing with a horizontal stacking is that you can really stack a lot horizontally. Gravity is on your side, because it'll keep it there, and you can work with it so much easier than you can if you're holding this up [vertically -UvR] and you're trying to put something else onto it. Just in terms of manipulation.

But the way it looks visually can be quite different when you use the [horizontal layering -UvR]—because I've recently started, again, to use the work horizontally. I mean, I'm sorry—I've used it horizontally a lot more than anything else, but I've started again to use the pieces vertically. And you can squeeze other kinds of things out of it that you can't when you're using it horizontally.

MS. RICHARDS: From the very beginning, was your process always an intuitive one?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think so. Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: That—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I just don't trust the—I don't even know what the intellect means. But I don't trust ideas. I don't even trust ideas that can be verbalized when it comes to art.

MS. RICHARDS: One could imagine when you were thinking intuitively about your piece that you might make drawings—again, non-intellectually—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: —conceived, but intuitive.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Sure.

MS. RICHARDS: Make one drawing, make 25 drawings thinking about the form that you wanted to begin from, not necessarily what the finished piece would look like, before you had actually outlined it on the floor.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Did that happen, or you actually just closed your eyes, thought about it, and outlined on the floor the piece that you were going to do?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think it's more like what you're saying, but it's not closing your eyes and thinking that this thing's going to come to you. It's often something that's been haunting you for a while. And it often sprouts from the last piece that I was working on. I couldn't do that with the last piece, although there were some implications in that last piece that made me think that this other thing could be done that I will be doing in the future.

If it haunts me enough, then I follow through. But sometimes—like with this piece that I'm working on now that you saw, the large piece—I know somewhat what I want to do in the front of it, with all of this fabric-like stuff that's on either side. I don't know yet how it is that I want it to cross. I want that whole thing to bridge, because I want an arch that one can walk through. But I don't know yet how I want that to bridge, because I might want a very awkward fold with it. Because I don't want to just make an arch, right? That's not—

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: So—and then, which means that then the back would also be affected. But I don't know if I want the back to be like the back of—I don't know, like bulldogs have certain folds in their skin that is so interesting—whether I want some of those folds in there, as one mountain sort of makes its way to another. "Mountain" is really not a good word to use, but those mounds.

So it's all not so clear. A lot of it is not so clear.

MS. RICHARDS: Has that been pretty consistent throughout the years your approach?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think so.

And then I don't want to sit and just think about it, because that usually gets me nowhere. But when I'm working on it, then implications start making themselves known in a way that [enables me to continue -UvR]—but I never verbalize that. Do you know what I mean? I just feel it. I just look at it and feel it. I never verbalize it.

MS. RICHARDS: When you're—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Although, I say to myself, Now, cut it out, Ursula. Or sometimes I'll say, Oh, no!

Something. But that's not that—those aren't words. Those are just sort of like exhaling or expressions of emotion.

[Audio break.]

MS. RICHARDS: Into the '80s we were talking about—I mentioned the 1986 *Three Boxes*, when you started using graphite. You did a piece called *Seven Mountains*. I have actually two dates. I have it as 1987 and then as 1986 to '88. Well, obviously, it took awhile to do. And you were just mentioning that it's actually in the collection of the Metropolitan [Museum of Art] now. But it's a major piece—a really monumental piece. I don't know if it was the largest indoor piece that you had done up to that point?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, it wasn't the largest indoor piece. I also did *Zakopane* that might have come shortly after it—

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —which was wider—

MS. RICHARDS: Same year, yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —but it wasn't as bulky. But *The Seven Mountains* was actually—it was given birth and it took so long, and those years are like they are because the center of *The Seven Mountains*—and they're actually like roots of sorts. Thick, thick, thick at the bottom and then getting thin at the top. I don't know of a good analogy for it. And they grow, also, to the side of one another. In other words, they also react to one another. They're five-foot-three high. So there's a way in which they don't overpower you. And it's, I think, one of the first pieces that I graphited—probably not the very first, but it's one of the first, because I remember thinking about it before I did it.

But the interesting thing is that there were chunks made out of cedar that were rectangles, that were cut on either side, that I actually started with. They were painted with silver at the very ends. And I put them on the floor. And then I said to myself, Ursula, these are your givens. It was from a piece that had failed. So, These are your givens, which meant that I could then think of the possibility of building around these things, which I did.

And so each one of those mountains has something that was done before for another piece that spans its depth. It's maybe four four-by-fours wide, and it's maybe four four-by-fours high. And it's got cut ends—the front, and then the back end is cut, so that in building around this, I found that when I got through, that these rectangular boxlike structures continued to show up in a sense, or make their presence known.

It's almost like a person swallowing a huge stone. That you would know, if that were possible, that you would see it there. You would feel its presence; you would feel the weight. And that's how it was with these things. It was like a foreigner coming in, but a foreigner that was related enough so that everything could grow around it. And this foreigner was painted in silver, so no matter how much graphite I would put on it, you would still know that it was a different thing happening behind that graphite than anywhere else. So that there was a presence of these kind of muted rectangles that were rejects that actually gave me the idea for that piece.

MS. RICHARDS: Has that happened in other works, where you'd take pieces from failed works—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Sometimes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: —and it launches something exciting?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, yes. Yes, there's a recent major piece that's called *Droga*—D-R-O-G-A—which is a piece that lies on the floor that's quite large, that has a beginning from a cut-up, failed piece. I hung it diagonally—because I knew I wanted that piece to move and move on the floor. I wanted it to move in a way that was very slow, very elegant. So I started it with a suspended diagonal that was a reject of a bowl that I had done. I just carved out the inside of it. I cut out the inside of it.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back to *The Seven Mountains*, you've used the seven forms in many works—actually, earlier than more recently, which I assume represents the seven siblings in your family.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't know!

MS. RICHARDS: But I—but is that true?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't like—

MS. RICHARDS: Because seven—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't like that.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, that's good we're discussing that, then. It's not a useful way of looking at it.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't know, but I don't think anything is that simple.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: If I made two, it would look like a couple. I rarely make things of two—

MS. RICHARDS: Right. Well, you do make—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —although I have done that.

MS. RICHARDS: But you have made things with three and five and four.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Other kinds of numbers too.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And 20 and 50.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Exactly. But they were not shaped like this. Somehow it felt right to have seven of them.

But in some way that I want to deny, you might be right. It's just that I would hate to think that—I never thought that, and I never think that while I'm doing it. I guess that's all I can say. That doesn't mean it's wrong.

MS. RICHARDS: Right, right.

[END SD 2.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Ursula von Rydingsvard in her studio in Brooklyn [NY], on November 17, 2011, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc three.

Yesterday, we were in the '80s.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Hi, Judith Richards.

MS. RICHARDS: Hi. [Laughs.] Good morning.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Good morning.

MS. RICHARDS: Yesterday we were in the '80s, touching on various subjects. And I wanted to go back to that period of time and ask you a few things.

First of all, in the '80s you were doing very large pieces; you had started to get commissions. In 1988, you had a show, which I understand really had a significant impact on your career, at Exit Art. And I wanted to ask you about that show and how you felt, in terms of being part of the New York, or beyond, art world—how you felt as an artist living in New York at that period of time. And how that show came about as well, in addition to how it affected you.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I was without a gallery for about four years. And I happened to invite—and by the way, I'm not sure that having a gallery or not having a gallery really affects my productivity, in the sense that I still keep working, basically, with the same schedule. But there are actually additional things that a gallery provides, which is—opportunities to enable one to evolve, like commissions, and an outlet for one's work, which is extremely important. That other people get to see it, that exhibitions happen, and so on.

So I was laying quiet. And it was actually during the time that I was teaching at Yale, although I was working pretty furiously, as I said, still in the studio. I asked Jeanette Ingberman and Papo Colo to come to the studio, which they did. And she decided to give me an exhibition, which was a real hit, in the sense that the work had been gestating for a good long while. And there's something about being under covers for so long that also enables you to think in ways that might be different if you constantly have an exhibition coming up. So that this was work that fermented for a while.

I made some very pivotal pieces there: *The Polish Wing*, *Iggy Comes Home*. But a really important one, a pivotal

piece—it's one of my most important pieces—*Zakopane*. Another very important piece, which the Brooklyn Museum got from that exhibition, was *You Went and Died*. In Polish it's called *Umarleś*. And another important piece from that exhibition was the *Seven Mountains*, which Bill Lieberman came on a Saturday to see. He said he couldn't sleep all weekend, so Monday morning he bought it for the Met. It kept sort of surfacing in his mind.

So I think everything sold out, and to some collectors that seemed pretty—everything didn't sell out. I still have *Iggy Comes Home*; I still have *Zakopane*. Some of those pieces are really so not domestic, and they can't go outside; they're very difficult to sell. That's kind of the story of my life. My work is not easy to sell.

I somehow choose to do a scale, and it almost chooses me, in the sense that this scale—and it's not true for all pieces, because I also enjoy making smaller pieces, but sometimes there's the challenge of a large piece that gives me many, many, many more chances to say something, because there are many more pieces of wood that are fit into that whole structure. It gives me a chance, perhaps, to get more complex. It gives me a chance, perhaps, to make a more layered kind of landscape on the surface. It gives me a chance, perhaps, to get lost and get anxious and thereby have to find my way back.

And often those are the moments that record visually some of the most interesting things, because you're working so hard. Your adrenaline is going. You're working so hard to get yourself out of what you see as a problem at the time.

I don't know that the beauty of not knowing so clearly where you're going, as these pieces are not designed—whatever that means—they're not drawn out. If I do make a drawing, it's a sketch that is often hardly ever related to what ends up being, but it's kind of a beginning. It's kind of an idea that I'm toying with, or might want to pursue. I never draw it in any detail. I never make a model unless I have a gun to my head.

MS. RICHARDS: You never show those drawings?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I never show those drawings, because I don't think they're worth seeing, really. They're worth seeing in the sense that they're sort of just the beginning, just beginnings, beginnings. I shouldn't say they're not worth seeing, but it's like starting little exercises that you do on the piano before you really play the piece itself—the music itself.

MS. RICHARDS: Since you're talking about how the pieces come into being conceptually and emotionally, maybe this is a good moment to describe the actual process that you use, which has obviously been developed not only for practical reasons—to make it stand and last—but to facilitate your thinking and your movement through the piece as it develops.

Maybe using—you could use *Seven Mountains* or *Zakopane* or whichever one you want to talk about your method of creating the pieces physically.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I'll use *Zakopane*. And I'm not sure that I can describe it so well without having the visuals to back me up. But I built that piece, I believe, in '87? I built a piece for the Solomon Gallery in Cincinnati—I believe that's where they are.

MS. RICHARDS: Carl Solway?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Carl Solway—sorry. Carl Solway.

So it was essentially a single panel that began as a panel on the floor that was dug out, because it had these bat-like structures with a square head that were resting on—inside the inlays that I had carved out in the wood in the flat platform for them. I had a black-like fence around it. I made holes inside of the cedar that was in the fence, that was lined—that flat of cedar—made holes. Put dowels that were wrapped in lead.

Inside of those squared heads that were in the inlays on that cedar platform, I had wax, sort of organic things that I squeezed together with my hand that were sausage-shaped. I made a number of them that were inside of inlays in the heads that were horizontal with one another. But they're very organic and very funky.

This turned into something very different. I got rid of the fencing. I got rid of those bat-like structures that had the head that felt like a rectangle—this was all cedar. I got rid of those, I got rid of the dowels. And I had, essentially, a flat plane of cedar that was about four, five feet wide that I stood up on the wall. And once I stood it up, I had a whole nother idea of what can be done with it.

I put these appendages at the top that actually surfaced, would float above your head and be appended to that flat cedar plane that I put against the wall. Then I put something akin to cedar sacks that were attached to the bottom portion where the bats were. So the bat had a square head at the bottom and a square head at the top. So I used them both. I used the inlays both, but to do very different things.

I painted it silver, then painted it white. I sent it to the Carl Solway Gallery in Cincinnati to be exhibited. It was in a show that Judy Pfaff was actually curating. It was exhibited there; it came back to the studio. I put it up against the wall again to look at it, and I just thought, This isn't enough; this doesn't really do it—that this piece still feels too anemic, too sort of vacant.

So I got an NEA grant for—actually, the Maryland Institute got an NEA grant, and they invited me to come and build a sculpture. I think their idea was somehow connected to teaching, so that they could see an artist build a piece, or so they could help an artist build a piece. So I brought this [flat panel made of four-by-four-inches cedar -UvR] with these floating appendages at the top that were attached to the panel with the sacks at the bottom.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean you brought part of the piece?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I brought the entire thing that I showed at Carl Solway that was about five feet wide and [11.5 -UvR] feet high.

MS. RICHARDS: So it turned out to be much larger. I can see the final dimensions.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. And I kept looking at it in the classroom of the Maryland Institute. I think it was a Sculpture 101 class, something like that. I brought one of my assistants with me, and I proceeded to build the rest of the sculpture, which actually somewhat mimicked what this panel had—actually more than somewhat. I can never mimic exactly, because every cut you make comes out different than every other cut. So you can never—it's not like a mold where you get a pretty good replica of what the givens are.

So I made additional panels, and I kept adding more panels until I felt like I could be released of this feeling of its needing something else, of its being not enough or of its feeling unfulfilled. And it ended up being so that it really enveloped the body for quite a distance. I haven't got the measurements in front of me, but it must have been 21 feet [wide -UvR], or something like that, in all. [This became *Zakopane*. -UvR]

MS. RICHARDS: When you say "enveloped the body," how do you mean that?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That it became a wall instead of an object—that you didn't think of it as a panel, that you didn't think of it as a picture that was relief, three-dimensional. In fact, I don't think you really thought of it as a relief; it was a kind of wall. And I think that it—I hope—I think it had an element in it that was kind of haunting, [from -UvR] all of those things that would hover above your head. And then for those sack-like structures [below -UvR] that actually had a cupping inside of them, they would swerve just a little bit with one another. I did all of this very consciously.

The panel continued to have the holes in it—the initial panel where the dowels that were covered with lead were in, because I was working a little bit with lead at the time. And I then proceeded to make those holes in all the other panels—of course, without the lead.

MS. RICHARDS: Why did you end up deleting the lead?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, it looked awful. They were [lead-covered -UvR] dowels that were wrapped and stuck way out. They felt more appropriate for the panel while it was down on the floor, but they looked completely ridiculous if I were to do that—especially with those more meaty structures of the sack and even with those more scrawny, armlike, tendon-like structures that were hovering above. It just would've been not good at all.

But the holes were pretty good. It was like a little constellation that—

MS. RICHARDS: And what did you end up doing with the surface?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: [The holes were -UvR] all over—you could hardly notice.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about the—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I painted it just as I did [the original panel -UvR]. I painted it silver first. I'm sorry, I think it was white first and then silver on top of the white, so that you still had a silver feeling, but the silver was also painted black after that. So there were quite a few layers, that ended up giving a feeling of sobriety and a somber feeling, because I could never leave anything painted white. That would be, for me, kind of a ludicrous place to be, because I don't know how to be—

MS. RICHARDS: —white.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —with white. I just don't know how to do that. And silver I knew I was going to hide, because I hate anything that's shiny. But this silver gets so matte and kind of eaten up in a way, with all of the

grainy surfaces of the cedar, that even if you paint it silver, it gets slurped up by cedar, by the grain.

MS. RICHARDS: Since you were covering most of the silver, why did you want to use silver in the first place?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: You can still see the silver behind the black.

MS. RICHARDS: So having something—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It made the black less insistently black. It's like when I look at eyes—as I'm seeing your eyes, I could almost imagine that there was some silver underneath. It's like the complexity of the colors—not just of eyes, of everything. Everything about what nature makes implies that it's not a single color. Nothing is ever a single color.

MS. RICHARDS: So you worked until you felt that piece was complete, in the context of that classroom.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. Now, the classroom for me—

MS. RICHARDS: It must have been incredibly interesting and useful for the students to watch this, and in some way hear you talk about it, but also—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think it—

MS. RICHARDS: —you were able to do your work, actually, outside your own studio and finish that piece.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think it ended up being not useful to the students at all. None of them knew how to use any tools. I was terrified of asking any of them. It felt in a way as though I was probably in their way, more than really being helpful. I don't think any of them were particularly interested in what I was doing.

It was Sculpture 101 so it's—you're just beginning. You're a freshman; you're really not thinking about, Will I be a sculptor? But it just wasn't a teaching situation that worked for me or for them.

But the great thing is, after they cleared the room, I was able to spread out. Because as it is, they took up room; the class takes up room. It wasn't really orchestrated very well, but sometimes the things that are orchestrated very poorly end up with fantastic results, which was the case here. There was no ventilation in that room. I did a tremendous amount of cutting. There was no ventilation. It was like a basement room. And if it had windows, you couldn't open them. So I was inhaling stuff that was not terrific. But I ended up cutting—I cut the entire piece there. I just can't believe how much I did.

MS. RICHARDS: Just you and one assistant?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: One assistant, but I did all of cutting. I did all of the painting. I have some of the slides of the process by which that piece was made in that setting. So I exhibited it there. The Maryland Institute has an exhibition space. It had tile floors that were the old tiles, that almost looked Italian, with little squares of black and white and black and white and black and white, with a kind of rim that had a different design. It was almost like pretending it was little lacework, and it would swerve, so that my piece was placed on top of that tile, and leaned against the wall, and exhibited.

And the reviewers hardly noticed that it was there. The reviews I read of that exhibition—because there were other works in that exhibition; it was a group exhibition—was like zilch, zero. It was like nothing. It was as though it wasn't there. But I don't think I really cared. I think, even in those days, that the only reviews that would count to me were the ones that came out of New York City.

This is really my home, my place, my community. This is so prejudiced, but I think New York is—I don't think too many other cities have really good critics. Often the critic—for example, in Indianapolis—that does the criticism for the museum shows is the same one that criticizes the car races.

So anyway, not that I even find many of the art critics in New York City that credible to me, but one can't expect that. That's a lot to expect. But at Exit Art, the publicity that not just that piece [*Zakopane*] got, but the entire show, was kind of a phenomenon—for me. And I think that it was an exhibition that made me surface as somebody that others could be and might be aware of.

MS. RICHARDS: Have I asked you about feeling part of the art world—New York art world? How did you feel in that regard, and did that show change that?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think I felt like it was a show that was extremely well attended. And that there were a lot of people that came that seemed quite important, that seemed—[... not only -UvR] important, but had eyes. That other artists came, collectors came, people that were savvy about art. And I feel that the publicity that

Michael Brenson did [indicated -UvR] he had a lot of faith in my work. At that time he was just drop-dead beautiful with his hair that was curly and coming out of his head, and really good-looking and shy, and so I just think he was very generous in what he said about that exhibition, which helped enormously.

MS. RICHARDS: In terms of criticism—we're touching on the subject—how do you respond when—I don't even know if this has happened—when you've gotten a bad review? Everything I've read has been very positive. I just wondered how you feel about criticism—not in the negative, but both positive and negative.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, I read it. I hardly even read it if it's out of town, but I read the New York City critics' criticism. And I hear it and I numb it out, depending on what it is. When they have suggestions as to what I should be doing, instead of what I'm doing, I can't imagine really listening to it, or I never have listened to it. I think that there is a way in which the criticism sometimes is too flip. Almost as though the writer is the more important one, rather than the artist that the writer is writing about.

But there are real exceptions. And when they come down really hard, and when any of it feels credible, it hurts. But even with that, I don't know that anybody's critical review has ever affected my work.

MS. RICHARDS: Is there something that a reviewer has written—or more than one interpretation they've presented—that is really wrong and you can take this opportunity to set the record straight?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No. I won't repeat what they have said that was really wrong.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Especially one critic. I won't—I can't do that to that person or—

MS. RICHARDS: Well, without even naming a particular review, is there a certain kind of misunderstanding that seems to crop up that appears from time to time, if not negative at all, just not the way you'd like people to understand your work?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah. That's a more general question, and I can answer that in a more general way. I feel confident in doing so.

People often think that they have a key to understanding my work, connecting it to the post-refugee—World War II refugee camps that I was in. And I find that to be really wrong, that that isn't the only thing that affects my work. There's a whole life that followed. There are a lot of artists I was exposed to. There's a lot of art that I saw. There are a lot of countries I've been to just seeking things that I thought might feed my mind, therefore maybe my work.

There are a lot of searches that I made, as going to Sweden, to Lapland to see if I could find things that had to do with a kind of—I don't want to insult Lapland—a kind of vision that did not look as contemporary, in a culture that perhaps was not as up on what the latest modes and inventions and styles and so on. Well, of course, I was disappointed, and of course, it wasn't at all what I expected. And of course, the people that I thought chased deer had fabulous red huge trucks, and they had sweet homes in which they lived that looked really quite neat and fine [and contemporary -UvR].

But I found other things in their museums that I needed to see. I found bowls that were used many, many years ago. I found wooden utensils. Wood is a huge thing, because in Sweden they have huge amounts of forests—a lot of, lot of forests. So obviously, at one time, before this extensive use of steel, that's what they used, wood. So there are things that I reaped from there that made me very happy that I went, but it wasn't what I [originally thought it would be -UvR].

That's often the case when one travels—especially the way I travel. I never really do research. I go on something that I feel my innards need, and then I see if I can find it. And the road to finding it is often a very interesting road. In some ways that's the way I make my work, that there's this homage, that there's this instinctive need, a want, and I follow that want. Often it leads me to really stray places that I never intended to be. And often that becomes the work at its best, and often it also becomes a real failure.

MS. RICHARDS: So there's a risk, obviously.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: You mentioned when you talked about the trip to Poland that you went on your own. And that going on your own—this was my interpretation, perhaps—enabled you to be more open to the experience and to be able to move whenever you felt like it.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's right. That's right.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you go to Lapland on your own as well?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, I went to Lapland on my own.

MS. RICHARDS: And how long ago was that? Well, approximately.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Maybe a long time ago.

MS. RICHARDS: In the '80s?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Maybe 24 years, 25 years ago—something like that. It was a long time ago.

MS. RICHARDS: So it was in the '80s. Recall?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Maybe late '80s.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, so just when we're talking about.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I made *Paul's Shovel* right after that.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, okay. *Paul's Shovel* is '87.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Eighty-seven, so it must have been '86—either '87 or '86. I made *Paul's Shovel* right after—that was very—that was influenced by Lapland—not that I saw anything like that in Lapland, but I knew that I needed to make this.

MS. RICHARDS: And that was the beginning, roughly, of several shovel pieces.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: I noticed you did shovels in '89, maybe in '88, too. There's *Box Shovel*, there's *Schwitters' Shovel* and then the [*House of*] *Spoons*. What was it about that form that interested you so much? You kept going back, and still do, I think—ladles, shovels, spoons.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah, I know.

MS. RICHARDS: And they're larger than life, but not so gigantic, pieces that can go on the wall, that maybe you can even create on your own without a lot of assistance, which would change the experience for you as well. No, maybe that's not true, that you do have assistants doing those spoons with you.

But so going back to the initial question: What is it about that form, its shape, its references that so interests you?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think I touched on it before in this interview—that I come from a long line of Polish peasant farmers, and that the shovel was an instrument that for me [is an icon -UvR]. It was obviously for them something that was very practical. For them, it was [different -UvR]. As we have our computers in front of us, I can only imagine that the farmer had his shovel by his side a lot—either the shovel or the scythe.

The shovel, for me, can be more anthropomorphic. Now, I'm not even that fond of being anthropomorphic, but there's something about the head of the shovel, and there's something about the stem. And it's not the reason why I use it at all—see, I'm going around the bush now, throwing roses.

MS. RICHARDS: And you always put the head at the bottom anyway.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I'm sorry?

MS. RICHARDS: Usually the way it's on the wall.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Not for *Paul*. That had the head on the top. And *Schwitters' Shovel* also has the head at the top.

So I feel like I have stuff running in my blood from many generations back, well before the war, of the people that had a real connection to the land and to whom the land was connected directly with their survival. But not just their survival. Their joy, [visual, sensual—making terrific demands on them -UvR]. I remember cooking potatoes outside, and you would just dig a hole in the land, and you put some wood—thin branches that you would break up—and then let the potato simmer.

MS. RICHARDS: Where did you do that?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: In the camps. [... -UvR] There was no oven. You couldn't bake things, because the oven that we had, you could only open the door and then feed the wood into it, and it would get hot on the top. So if any baking needed to be done in some of those camps, my mother would actually bring the dough to some place that she would walk to that would do the baking. Then she would wait there, pick it up, and bring it back home [as whatever stoves we had never contained ovens -UvR].

I could only recall the unbelievable, indescribable joy that all of the kids in the family had when she would bring home one of those German *kuchen*, which was almost like a coffee cake—it was a square, maybe 36 inches by 36 inches, with this cake that would rise [because of the yeast -UvR]. There wasn't baking soda or baking powder. So it was really quite airy on the inside. And then there were little bits of butter—and butter was not easy to come by—that would be stuck in periodically that was kind of a rhythm in that surface. And within that they would spread sugar. It was usually rather grainy sugar that they'd spread on the top. And it was baked like a golden [color -UvR]—

MS. RICHARDS: Wow. [Laughs.]

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And to eat it still hot was like entering heaven itself.

MS. RICHARDS: That must have been a rare treat.

[... -UvR] but I was answering a question.

MS. RICHARDS: You were talking about the central role the shovel had played in the farmer's life.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, yes. Even in the camps, since my father started a garden wherever it was possible to start a garden, because that was a part of what enabled us to survive. A shovel was something that, I guess—like a cowboy's gun.

MS. RICHARDS: What did it mean to you to name that shovel *Paul's Shovel*? After your husband?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I'm crazy about my husband. He's a really good guy.

MS. RICHARDS: And you had been married just a few years by then—1987.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah. I was totally in love.

MS. RICHARDS: And then *Schwitters' Shovel* is also an homage to Kurt Schwitters.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think Schwitters is brilliant, brilliant visually. You can almost tell, by how brilliant he was visually, that he was also very smart. Just by the way he would negotiate the visuals on his surface, or the three-dimensional visuals that he negotiated in that piece that he made that was kind of an environmental piece in a corner of the room.

That he was calculating, in an extraordinarily poetic way, very sensitive way. [... -UvR].

[Audio break.]

MS. RICHARDS: Another question about working methods: When you think of a piece like the 1989 *Lace Mountains*, which is a piece that is built up from the floor, could you describe how you built that, how that was made? Maybe it was an illusion in a photograph or a video I saw, but it looked like the graphite created color. I could see—as I said, maybe it was the photograph—blues and browns and yellows—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: You're right.

MS. RICHARDS: —in the graphite.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: You're right.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that just an illusion from the photographic process, or is it actually there?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No. What I did with *Lace Mountains*—

MS. RICHARDS: So the construction, plus the surface of that?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. The construction of it was essentially placing a four-by-four cedar beam—which is what a lot of my work is made from, even though sometimes I use two-by-four beams. The two-by-four enabled me to get more details, because you get twice as many surfaces to cut. Also it takes a lot longer to cut, because it takes more than twice as many boards to build the same amount.

But the *Lace Mountains* was made out of four-by-four cedar beams. And four by four is never four by four. It's three-and-three-quarter inches by three-and-three-quarter inches. I would lie the first beam on the floor, and I would have some idea of where it is that I wanted to go.

I remember having, not long before that, made a piece that was called *Girlie Girl* that the museum in Virginia [Virginia Museum of Fine Arts] acquired. And it actually had—because I'm always, always wanting to see if I can make the cedar not so grounded. The cedar is so heavy. It's not as heavy as other woods, but nevertheless, that gravity keeps pulling it down. With *Girlie Girl*, I made extensions that actually had little staccato two-by-fours that were glued to one another that were kind of hoops that went in back of *Girlie Girl* and in front, hoping to energize that piece, hoping to make a profile that you could partially see through, hoping to make something like lines, instead of these solid, heavy structures.

So in this case, I had a little bit of that in mind—you know, as I speak, I think I made *Girlie Girl* before. I'm not positive, but I think that was the sequence.

MS. RICHARDS: Actually, it was made afterward.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: After!

MS. RICHARDS: I was looking and looking, and finally, I see—because I was looking back—but looking forward, it's 1991.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: So the one I'm describing now actually influenced the making of *Girlie Girl*—this want to be light.

Okay. So with *Lace Mountains*, I had the four-by-four cedar beams that I would lie on the floor. And I would only lie one at first. I would draw on all four sides on the front of the piece, all four sides on the back of the piece. So we're now at the very bottom on the floor, beginning with the first piece. I then cut the front lines that I marked and the back lines that I marked. And in cutting it—

MS. RICHARDS: With the power saw?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: With a circular saw. Mine is a Hitachi. My guys use Milwaukeees, which are much heavier, but they have much more power; the Hitachi is lighter. So when I cut, I sometimes make a number of cuts, depending on whether or not I want it to feel the flakes of the visual evidence of these cuts more, or less. And a whole lot of other things are considered in the cutting of the piece.

So I cut the front; I cut the back. I put it back into the place where it started. Then I have this given, with two sides—the back and the front cut. I put another four-by-four next to it. I draw a line then, around the four-by-four, starting with actually mimicking the edge that was cut of the first piece and going over to the top, making my own line there. Going to the bottom, making my own line there and making my own line at the very—the part that catches the floor. Do the same thing on the back. Again, marking the piece on four sides, with the given being a side that was already cut. And I usually mimic that side, mimic that curve, mimic the way that was cut. And I go and cut that.

So you see, it's—every small, small portion of the cut is controlled by that line that I draw. Then I put the second piece next to the first. So this is a horizontal layering on the floor. Then I start on the second layer and third layer, all horizontally placed, one on top of the other. And of course, you need to screw them in to one another in order for the entire stacking not to collapse, which it would. Even if you put the four-by-four on top of any stack—even a stack of two or three—it'll collapse, because the four-by-four has weight, and it will jar it. So there's a lot of screwing that's done in the piece before it gets glued.

And while it's still screwed, you have a chance of going back, unscrewing layers and going back to something that doesn't feel right. After it's glued, you have no chance to go back to it.

MS. RICHARDS: So in the stage when it's—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: At this stage you can salvage it.

MS. RICHARDS: —all screwed, you're testing. You're looking at it and say, Okay this is right.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Or, I want to change that whole piece, or go back into it.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's right.

MS. RICHARDS: So it enables you to stand back and check and evaluate—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's right.

MS. RICHARDS: —think about the next direction, the next steps.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's right.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that system developed through the experience of actually gluing too soon? When you realized, Oh, I really need a stage in between, where I'm just going to screw them?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, I think it was always evident, if I was able to see it—obviously, sometimes you don't see things until after they're glued, because you're not in a state of mind where you can really catch it. And there are things that we have been able to cut off—not infrequently. Edges that we've been able to cut off that really bugged me, after I had to look at it a month or two. It's the best test if you live with it for a long time. If you have to look at it, and if it's really bothersome, then you get it more clearly as time goes by.

So there have been things that we have just literally sliced off. Maybe even sliced off a top or sliced off a side—two sides, depending on what the problem was.

MS. RICHARDS: As we're moving out of the '80s into the '90s, you did a very large piece I think it will be interesting to talk about, at the Capp Street Project [CA]. When you had a very brief, six-week residency, you did an enormous project called—and how do you pronounce this?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: *Ene Due Rabe*.

MS. RICHARDS: And that was working with an enormous group—well, some assistants and volunteers. I have a lot of questions about that.

How did you conceive of that piece? Did you wait until you actually were standing in the space that it would be [in] to think about it? How did you involve so many people, having to teach them what to do in such a brief period of time, and get them up and running to finish that? I guess that's it. How did you conceive of it—the space was dictated to you, right? You had to do it in that space?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. That's correct; that's correct.

There's a woman by the name of Ann Hatch—who I have since come to know really well and not only respect, but I really like—that headed that project. She started the Capp Street Project. And it was, as you say, a six-week residency that actually—yeah, six-week residency. It seemed like I stayed there longer, but I don't think so.

In other words, after working for six weeks, you had an exhibition at the end of that time.

MS. RICHARDS: Right. This was in San Francisco.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And that meant that since I make objects, and since they're so time-consuming to make, that this was a huge challenge and a huge charge for me.

I remember Ann and I going to a lumberyard. There was a way in which she negotiated the world that was so different from the way that I negotiate it. I suppose in part because she knows San Francisco so well, and she really likes San Francisco so much, because of its informality and because—I don't know, the importance of friendships. I'm going to be making generalities now. But it's almost—one could even say it's a kind of resort, because it's near so much water. And yet it's a real city, a very real city and highly cultural.

MS. RICHARDS: But you accepted this—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: So Ann took me to a lumberyard—yes—

MS. RICHARDS: —this was a huge challenge, but it intrigued you enough, interested you enough to take it.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, I did take it; I did take it. And I sent some proposal—I don't even know what that proposal was, because they wanted to know what it was that I was going to be doing. I just said that I needed this much cedar, which—she comes from people that grow cedar, and the sales of that cedar is what enabled her to do something as great as the Capp Street Project.

So she went with me to a lumberyard. And there was a way that I communicated that I think was pretty ineffective. So she took over in a way that really got things done in the way that they needed to be done in terms of getting the cedar that I needed. But essentially, she also gave me cedar from—I think she also bought

an additional amount of cedar. In other words, she gave me more money than was slated—that was ordinarily slated for the artists—because she knew that I was going to probably build a big project. Although I wasn't even so sure at that time, but I just knew I needed a lot of cedar.

So I lined up the cedar on the floor. It was a garage, a detailing plant that used to deal with cars that crashed and they would try to fix them up. It had a walkway like a balcony on three sides that you could walk around and look down from. And then an office on [that balcony -UvR].

After putting and covering almost the whole floor with the cedar planks, cedar four-by-four beams, I then just drew circles on it. But I drew it freehand; there were no [straight -UvR] lines. I drew it—

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't make a grid in advance, in other words.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, definitely not. And I think that that is always a killer for me, because I have to make the body and the motions that the body makes a part of that process. I have to put the human—that is, the human seal—into it. And you can't do it by drawing lines or drawing a grid. That stifles it or stymies it.

MS. RICHARDS: That seems like an absolute constant, the body. When you talk about your work, you move your hands around your own body.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: It's very sensual and physical relationship—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: —with the piece.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: So there ended up to be, I read, 98—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, you counted?

MS. RICHARDS: No. I read it. I didn't count it. [Laughs.] Read it, that there was 98, and the reviewer called them "body-sized cavities," in this piece. [Laughs.] That's quite a few circles, 98.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: So, yes, 98. I didn't even know that.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, that's okay. I'm adding to your—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think each one had either nine or 11—I forget what it was. Each row, each row. Then when I made the first row—and I would stand up, so that it was additional. I would force myself to do it relatively quickly, because otherwise you stand and start doubting yourself and doubting the flow that you need.

The only way you can have the flow is if you have it within—if you drew that drawing within a certain amount of speed. Not that you have to run doing it, but you do have to mobilize yourself in a way so it doesn't become static. The more static your body is, the more static that drawing will be, because you're using your entire body. It's not like doing a drawing where just your fingers are moving while you're doing your drawing, which is most often the case.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: So this is my model; this is what I start with. But it's not really a model; it's just the beginning. And okay, so I did those circles. And then I gave the guys the circles. They marked all the boards, so they could—

MS. RICHARDS: Who are the guys?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Fantastic, fantastic guys. There's Charles Juhasz-Alvarado—was one of my princes.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell Juhasz? How do you—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: J-U-H-A-S-Z. The [Puerto Rican -UvR]—

MS. RICHARDS: Alvarado?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And Alvarado was really more him, because that's his mother.

MS. RICHARDS: You met him in San Francisco, or he was somebody you brought?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, no, no, no. He was one of my people. I couldn't trust anybody else to cut but somebody who was [already cutting in my studio -UvR]. And Steve Weiss was there—fantastic, fantastic—

MS. RICHARDS: W-E-I-S?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. S-S. And Vincent Ciniglio. And all of those names are in the back of the book. [... -UvR]

[Audio break.]

MS. RICHARDS: So you drew these circles and then you had these—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Cutters.

MS. RICHARDS: —masterful cutters.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, yes, yes. And there was a guy, by the name of Dan, who would hand the wood to me, and I would mark it, and he would bring it to them to cut. And since I had choices of three—because there are some cutters that are more aggressive than others—depending on the kind of cut I want. Some cutters are more lyrical; cutters have their own styles of cutting.

MS. RICHARDS: Sure. Like handwriting.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Exactly like that. So I would give the pieces—I would say, "Give this to Vince," or "Give this to Charles."

Anyway, this was one of the most hardworking periods of my life. And I think it was certainly the hardest-working period of the guys that I brought from New York City with me, because they had a schedule of gluing for four hours—a tremendous amount that they needed to glue for four hours. Then they went up to the office and slept for four hours. And then they glued again for four hours. And then they slept again.

I'm not sure—in other words, the sleeping—everything was coordinated so that they could get the absolute maximum number of laminations so that the piece would be done by the opening day. And it was done, but we were graphiting right up until the last moment before the opening. [... I lectured -UvR] all over San Francisco—California College of Arts and the San Francisco Art Institute, begging for volunteers to do the graphiting. I must have had about 45 people doing the graphiting.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you know, I read that you had 150. Is that wrong?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Okay. No—

MS. RICHARDS: Is that wrong?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Probably altogether, because I also had a lot of people coming in from the University of Southern California. So I had a good number of people there. And we would lie on the floor, sleeping at David Ireland's house that he built in San Francisco, that, since then, the museum, the San Francisco Museum of [Modern] Art, has acquired. They would lie on the floor in sleeping bags, all of these volunteers, because where else were they to sleep? But [for] the people that were living in San Francisco, in Oakland, it was not a problem because it was so close.

But it was a huge effort by many, many people. I had a woman that came from Australia that was just fantastic. I wrote to her and corresponded with her.

MS. RICHARDS: You're like Christo—people following you internationally.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't know; I don't know. But this really needed people. And because I was so desperate for additional assistance—I saw this guy walking toward—because we always had the garage doors open, as the air then—they would actually be cutting on the sidewalk so that the cedar could flow out toward the road, or outside of the space that we were all in. And I see this man walking with these fine muscles. And there's a way in which he was wearing this very thin T-shirt that would just show it all, with short, short—with the actual—the cut off—the arm part of the T-shirt.

MS. RICHARDS: Sleeves.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: The sleeves, exactly. So he walks in and he seems very confident; his posture seems

great. So I ask him, beckon him to come toward me. And he did, and when he came toward me, the conversation started with his nose almost touching mine. And I kept going back. It just seemed like a stance that was very—more than confident.

MS. RICHARDS: Confrontational?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Perhaps, yes. Confrontational. I then spoke to him about the possibility of his helping us with this project. I tried to seduce him in telling about what the project was. And I then find out in the course of our conversation—not too long thereafter—that he was going to a violence control center. [Laughs.] So I just backed away and sort of smoothed my request for his services, saying, "Maybe, maybe." "Maybe we'll need you and maybe—let's just see."

In any case, I was extremely fortunate to get a lot of students. They were wonderful.

MS. RICHARDS: And in the end, you were very pleased with this piece?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It was wonderful, because you could see it from the [balcony -UvR]. You could see something that felt as though it were moving and unraveling. So you had a view of it that was very special. Also, you could look at it directly—but directly, it felt as though it was in this larger box, which was the garage. So it wasn't until that piece got onto Storm King [Art Center], and it had its wonderful grasses and its deep, deep landscape, [that it made sense -UvR].

MS. RICHARDS: So you took that afterward. I guess you had to cut it up to take it out?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I had to cut it up in order to transport it.

MS. RICHARDS: And then happily, it got to Storm King.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It got to Storm King. And I already knew about the Storm King exhibition when I was making it, so I had in mind putting it in Storm King.

MS. RICHARDS: So you knew when you making it, it would be an outdoor piece?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I did know when I was making it, it would be an outdoor piece. But I did not make it in a way that would make it a durable outdoor piece that would last, because I wanted all of the vulnerabilities of the walls. I wanted that to remain.

And it's my hope one day that these pieces that I am still storing that are—that can be outdoors, that have been outdoors for a year or two and I knew that they would not last any longer. So I take them in and I store them, hoping one day that there will be some museum or some institution that will accept it and will care for it on the inside. That somewhere it will have enough room to be shown or to be exhibited.

MS. RICHARDS: Is all that storage here in this studio in Brooklyn?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No. I have a lot of storage in a place called Accord, where I had my summer studio for many years—a cedar studio that I built.

MS. RICHARDS: That's A-C-C-O-R-D?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. That's correct. And it's a studio which I used for four months out of the summer for many years. But I was really away from my husband for too long. He would come on Thursday night or sometimes Friday, but—so we made huge efforts to buy the building that I have right now—

MS. RICHARDS: Where we are sitting.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —which I've had for seven years. Yes. Where we are sitting in Bushwick, which is on the ground floor, which means that I can actually—

[End of Track.]

[In progress]—unload the semi-[trailer] trucks that come in with the four-by-four cedar beams, which means that I'm actually able to take the work out that needs to go out, even the large pieces that have donuts that we stack. We call them "donuts," but they're circles. They're huge, huge flat circles that stack and make a bowl, as often my bowls do. These are things that were extremely difficult to get out of the window on my South Fifth Street studio. And the window, I actually carved—

MS. RICHARDS: Sure. Because you were on the second floor.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —up. Yes, I carved the brick of the bottom part of the window out, so at least the window was made larger. But nevertheless, it was a window that we had to hoist out every single portion of every piece that we made and hoist it down, so that—it was very difficult, actually, for a truck to move into that piece of land so that my pieces could be put into it. It was real acrobatics, and the elevator was very small and dysfunctional. It was one that was built in the late 1800s.

MS. RICHARDS: Since we're talking about the studio, it brings me to ask you some questions about operating in a relatively large, huge building with a permanent crew of assistants. I assume as the years have gone by, and as your work has grown and your ambitions and ability to support all that, that the operation has grown, and you have more people working for you on a steady basis. But how do you feel about that?

You come to work every day on a regular schedule. You have all these people you're employing who are depending on you. It's a very different—it's not that there's many sculptors today or even painters who have such needs. How do you feel about that, and how does it impact your work and, obviously, helps you get more done. But could you talk about the life of a sculptor who runs a big studio like this?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right. It's a huge, huge responsibility. But if I can back up a little bit, I was on my own for many years.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't think I hired an assistant before I was working for at least 15 years, and then they would be part-time.

MS. RICHARDS: So, until about the early '90s?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, no. Actually, I hired an assistant for the Art Park piece, but those assistants were just temporary for that piece, and we worked out on the site in Lewiston, New York, overlooking the gorge into which Niagara Falls fell. We heard it from where we were.

But we stayed there, I don't know for how long, but it was for a good part of the summer building that piece, and then that was the end of that. Then I was on my own again. So that I would just sporadically—the *St. Martin's Dream* I made completely on my own. *Kosharava* [ph] I made completely on my own. Those were both in '79. I think one was '79. One was '80.

I had help with the Art Park piece. I made a beautiful piece called *Nine Cones* that I set up on [the] Battery Park city landfill, which looked very much like a beach, and I photographed it there. I haven't really published it, or I haven't really put it in any book, and I think in the next book I will. But I made that completely on my own and that's quite sizable. I made all of the pieces that I showed at 55 Mercer [Gallery] on my own. I made all of the pieces that I showed at Rosa Esman [Gallery] on my own.

MS. RICHARDS: That was 1984.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. So I think one of the first full-time assistants I had was Amy Cohen.

MS. RICHARDS: Amy Cohen?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Amy Cohen, and she worked—she went to Yale. She was an art major. She was a painting major and she must have been five feet one, extraordinarily beautiful, and she was my other two hands and she worked for me in South Fifth Street.

[... -UvR]

MS. RICHARDS: So then you had one, and she was a permanent employee.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: But I think, as of the last 15 years, I haven't really grown much. I think it's been basically the same team of people. I have two people that work with me downstairs almost all the time. One of them [is] a master with gluing, so he glues a lot. And the other one does some of the ordering the tools, and ordering material, but also [coordinates the -UvR] organization of installations, de-installations, does a lot of emailing when I have an exhibition; there's a whole lot of things that have to get unraveled in order for it to go smoothly. [All three help with the making, the building of the artwork. -UvR]

So, basically, for a very long time I've had mostly two people that I work with. And then a third one comes in and goes, and that's Ted Springer, [who] comes from Tucson, Arizona, then he goes. So he worked maybe four or five months out of the year.

I am very, very insistent on having people that have worked with me that I can trust in terms of safety—that's

extraordinarily important—that do not have needy egos, that have egos that are tucked in, that know without being told that the most critical thing that happens all day when we're together is the artwork being made, how the work is made, and that it's in keeping with all of the details that I require.

There's very little conversation that happens. They know by what I do, in the way in which everything is orchestrated around the building of a piece, and with what I ask during the building of the piece. They know without being told what needs to be done, and the cutters now know all of my signs—depending on the way I do the drawing on the wood. That's their entire focus, is on that drawing, while they do the cutting, besides the safety.

To have cutters cut the way they cut is kind of a miraculous thing for me to have. I consider them the princes of my studio. They need to have a skill that is beyond what is required in order to use the circular saw really well. That is, they need to have a skill that can calculate, with great speed, what kind of danger signs there can be in the kind of cutting that they do. So I'm unbelievably fortunate to have these people that do that, and I know exactly what's involved because I've done it so many years.

So I know exactly where I can push them and how I can push them, and I know, too, which parts of what they do [that] can become dangerous. So I know how to also curb that, by the kinds of drawings that I do, and the size of the pieces that I give them to cut on.

So Rubin Munoz now, and Ted Springer now, are just truly, truly valuable, but so is Sean Weeks Earp. Sean does—he is the guy who—

MS. RICHARDS: What's his last name?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Weeks Earp. It's like Wyatt Earp. He's related to Wyatt Earp. [... -UvR] So I just feel incredibly fortunate to have a team that comes here and that [understands that]—the needs of the work are the absolute priority of our existence in this space, and that they not only have no problem with it, but this is what they want. And I can't tell you how different this makes this world [of my studio -UvR] from the outside world [... -UvR].

And whatever differences they might have between one another, I never hear about it, or it's rare that I hear about it, or they settle it amongst themselves. And then I just hired somebody—Tamare has been with me, I think, for maybe 12 years—11 years.

MS. RICHARDS: What's her last name?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Gubernat—G-U-B-E-R-N-A-T.

MS. RICHARDS: She's an office assistant?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: She's wonderful, wonderful with doing all of the paying the bills and keeping track of all of the—I don't have to immerse myself with the financial stuff except making sure the money is there.

MS. RICHARDS: You're making a terrible face. [Laughs.] Yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Me making sure the money is there for her. So sometimes there's a lot of pressure in how much we spend, but this is what I live for. This is what I need to do, and this is what I'll do until I die, for sure. I even have images of my having to sit in a hoist or something; if my legs give in or if my fingers give in, I'll figure out some way of still drawing on the wood.

MS. RICHARDS: There's another woman, who I met yesterday, who's also working here upstairs with Tamare.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, Andrea.

MS. RICHARDS: Andrea.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Andrea Gonzalez is marvelous. She's a marvel. She's brilliant. She's a summa cum laude from University of Pennsylvania.

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. University of Pennsylvania I think she said.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: She taught at Tyler. She's just so—and she's gentle and she's brilliant—and the attitude is so good. I'm so lucky to have her.

MS. RICHARDS: So that's five permanent? Four permanent?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, Andrea works four days a week and Tamare works three days a week. So—and now we've acquired Sean Weeks Earp's girlfriend, whom he's going to marry very soon, from Thailand, that he just imported from Thailand, and they corresponded with one another furiously for a year to make this possible. So she's going to be a part—not of the studio necessarily, but she wants to come and cook Thai food. You'll have it today.

MS. RICHARDS: Fantastic.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And it's going to be great, and we have to keep track so we can eat with them, is the only reason I'm looking at my watch.

MS. RICHARDS: Good. You were talking about, at some point, I think—as you're building the pieces the question, "Am I done? Is this finished? Do I need more?" Is that a difficult experience with each piece, or does it usually resolve itself smoothly, or is it a struggle to know when it's done?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: With some pieces it's easier to determine than other pieces. Some pieces just never get done for some—they just never get done. Other pieces sort of assert themselves as—that's it—that's enough. Then others are somewhere within that range of uncertainty still, about whether or not it's done. And one of the things that I always fear, and I think it's a problem, actually, that I have, is that I overdo the done part. I'm afraid of it.

It's like I'm afraid of over-editing as I'm building. I'm afraid of it. I'm afraid of lining up too neatly, whether it's my wedges, whether it's the undercuts, whatever it is—that they die on me. I'm afraid. And yet I'm also afraid of dispersing things in a way that there ends up being no relationship that has a meaning to me.

I think this comes another important matter, too, in that I never think about anybody else's mind while I'm doing my work, because it's all I can do to reach into something that I feel—something inside of me that I feel that I can get worthwhile messages from, without worrying about anybody else's insights or anybody else's eyes or anybody else's mind. So it's just me that I need to excite, and it's not easy. But, obviously, there's nothing I'd rather be doing.

MS. RICHARDS: You're working, as I saw yesterday, and this must be usually the case, on many different pieces at the same time. You have earlier works—finished, completed works—in the studio, maybe because you want them there, maybe because they simply need to—that's where they need to be stored. How is working on many pieces at once an advantage, or a reality that that's the way work progresses?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I guess if I get stuck on a piece, it's just great to have an option of going to another one that you haven't kind of dealt with for a week or two or a month or two. And it seems not so hard when you have that time distance between the last time it felt so impossible. It feels more possible, somehow, when time goes by. Not always but often.

And then to have another piece, another smaller piece that seems to be beckoning, because you're excited about that—not because you were stuck but because you're excited to go to, is all good.

But it's important that when I make large pieces, like the one you see me working on now, that I see it through from beginning to end, because otherwise there's a lot of preparation of the studio in order—not just to make room for that, but to take down the proper wood for it, to set up the cutting area for it and so on.

You don't want to keep putting that away and opening it up again, because it's very time-consuming. So with larger pieces, I really need and want to see them through from beginning to end, if I at all can—sometimes it's not possible, but if I at all can.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So it's the smaller pieces to which you can go back and forth, as you talked about a few minutes ago. See new things, put it down, go back a week later. But the larger pieces you see through to at least a stage where most of the major construction has been completed.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. Correct. I'd like to see it through until it's finished with the screwing stage—so it's basically a finished piece except for the gluing, which is a big deal. And except for the graphiting, which is also a big deal. [... -UvR]

MS. RICHARDS: Over the years, you've introduced other elements. There's that wonderful piece—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: *Maglownica*.

MS. RICHARDS: —with the bronze—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, the bronze.

MS. RICHARDS: —roots coming down.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: There are pieces with chalk, with paint, with felt, with the cow intestine. There's these different elements. How do those different pieces enter into your thinking? This is kind of a broad question, but is it as you begin a piece you realize there are other things that you want to have happen that need another material, or is it when you're thinking or dreaming before you even started a piece, or you just encounter a material someplace in the world and say, "I want to bring that into my work?" How do those new experiences happen?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I wish I did realize ahead of time. Often, I don't. However, when I finished building *Luba*, which is the piece at Storm King—they commissioned that piece for their 50th anniversary.

MS. RICHARDS: That's a recent piece. Yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. That's a recent piece. When I finished the part where you screw everything together, and then I started building these thin, thin appendages that extended from that bulbous shape that attached itself to the side of that piece, and it touched the ground, I knew it was way too vulnerable for it to exist outdoors in wood. I knew I had to make it in bronze.

So I went to Tallix, to Polich Art Works, and had them sand-cast it, which is the cheapest way to go, but their sand-caster is spectacular. So they did a beautiful job, and then I put the patina on that. I did that myself with the patina, so that I was able to make a transition between the wood, and then the blackened tip of that appendage that touches the grass.

MS. RICHARDS: I haven't seen that, just in photographs. It's amazing.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah. Thanks.

MS. RICHARDS: I know that there—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: One thing I hope so much—in my doing my work, I hope so much that the work gets better, though I have no assurance of that really. But that piece [*Luba*] is—I do feel good about that piece. I do feel good about having broken a way of working that made that entire structure solid, instead of a bone shape, and that had this growth, this kind of aberration, coming out of its side, that sort of is very convoluted and folds in on itself, and then out of which come those two appendages that are more slender.

I believe that to be stepping in a direction that's not just new, but I thought a direction that worked. And no sooner do I say those words than I have these [thoughts -UvR] of doubt. So—

MS. RICHARDS: We're talking about *Luba*, which is dated 2010, and is that on permanent display at Storm King?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It's not a permanent piece, no. I think they're trying to acquire it. Let's see what happens.

MS. RICHARDS: When I saw the extension coming out from the side in the photograph, it reminded me of the—I don't know what you call them—tumors, the things that trees sometimes get that are really fascinating strange growths. Is that some—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It didn't really go through my head but I can understand how you thought that.

MS. RICHARDS: Obviously, you can get branches that have come out and have been cut off either by a saw or by lightning—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah. And it's not just tumors on a tree but—have you seen tumors like on a dog?

MS. RICHARDS: No.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah. They really start popping out and hanging out. I imagine one's innards, a cancer —

MS. RICHARDS: Well, I didn't have a negative—I didn't have a experience of that work being—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, but—yeah. No. No, no, no, no, but I understand what you're saying.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. So a question—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: In other words, it's an interpretation that I think is a real possibility.

MS. RICHARDS: You talked about how things evolve as you go along, so, obviously, you may start out with a concept in your mind, but you may end up someplace else that you didn't even realize you would be when you finished. So it's a very fluid process.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's right.

MS. RICHARDS: Are there ever times when no ideas are coming?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] What is that like, and what do you do to get back on track?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I come to the studio every day. I come to the studio at eight o'clock whether ideas come or not, and then the more I'm here, it seems, the more the ideas come. And sometimes taking a trip to some very unfamiliar place helps. Just cutting, cutting away from the studio.

MS. RICHARDS: Now, that's probably a fairly big undertaking with plans. On a daily basis, some people would just take a jog or do something to get away that's a smaller amount of planning that just can be spontaneous. Do you do anything?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. I can go to the flea market and get objects that I love. "Love" is a strong word. I better not use that. But I surround myself with objects that give me pleasure to look at, and often they're very primitive.

MS. RICHARDS: Which flea market?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: There used to be one off of Avenue of the Americas on 25th Street [and Broadway - UvR], I think, and they used to have terrific Chinese things. It's still—

MS. RICHARDS: They say it exists. It migrated into a garage.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah, but that garage was never any good, I never liked it. [The objects rarely looked interesting. -UvR]

MS. RICHARDS: So there's two levels of an indoor garage. Yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right. I never really found much there. I did buy some wooden bowls and—

MS. RICHARDS: There are flea markets in Brooklyn, but they're just on the weekend.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I know. I should—

MS. RICHARDS: So it's not really something you can do on a daily basis.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No. No. No. No.

MS. RICHARDS: The flea market is just on the weekend. But that's something that you enjoy.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah. And I guess just getting my blood circulating by doing some exercise is good. But I'm not a freak, I think, about exercising. To tell you the truth, I get a good bit here in the studio with building the artwork, and I'm—

MS. RICHARDS: Absolutely.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —eternally grateful that I don't have to sit in front of a computer all day, every day. Very grateful.

MS. RICHARDS: You were talking about the small pieces and the big pieces, and I think I threw out a question I want to go back to. Is doing small pieces that might get done more quickly, that might involve less collaboration with an assistant, a way to also experiment, or explore new ideas, or simply have the sense of getting something done more quickly? Or are none of those relevant?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Boy, I'm a huge fan of getting something done very quickly, but—

MS. RICHARDS: And a small piece can get done more quickly and [offer] a sense of "finished."

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Exactly. But, unfortunately a lot of my work really is not done quickly. It's unfortunate in how long it takes and the effort that it takes. However, there's obviously stuff in how long it takes and the effort that it takes that's extremely attractive and important to me, not the least of which is that—I think that most of my most major pieces are of a scale that is not domestic, and I don't even want to say this, because I really have made the many small pieces—like there's a piece named *Oddychająca*.

MS. RICHARDS: Can you spell that?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's O-D-D Y C-H-A-J-Ą-C-A— *Oddychająca*.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Oh, yes. Okay. Now that I see it in writing—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That was cut—I drew it, and it was cut by Ted Springer and it wasn't until the following year, and I kept looking at it. It was just a piece that had corrugated indentures in it, with a soft curve, so it was kind of a collar. And it wasn't until a year later that I decided to dig into it and put something on it that unfurls—that kind of disrupts the regularity of the rows of the corrugation of that collar. So this unfurls, comes out, in a way that made that piece, and I think it's kind of an important piece, and it's small.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember what year that was?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I just finished it [2011].

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah. It's under covers now. It was at the gallery in the back room, and it's going to be at the Museum of Arts and Design in the fall.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, yes.

You talked about going to Lapland and looking at the work there, especially in wood, and I wanted to ask you. I think you went to Japan and—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I went many, many times to Japan.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, okay. You talked about going to the pre-Colombian sites in Mexico. Could you talk about your interest in looking at the work of these other cultures, usually distant but sometimes not, and what you're looking for, or what ends up coming from those experiences that you put into your work? So, going out of your own culture to these other cultures.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I just know when I was in Guatemala, there was a whole town, very small town, probably a village, it should be called, that was on top of a hillside. Not a very high one, but I know that the land that they built all of their homes on was very irregular, and that they built these things without—there's no such thing as city planning.

I guess you just have this itty-bitty piece of land, and you build whatever it is that you need to build. It was more than that. It was almost akin to something that maybe ants would build, maybe—

MS. RICHARDS: Termites?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —maybe termites would build, in how these passageways that had walls made out of that rock. They're all sort of round rocks that they piled one on top of the other. It wasn't always so round, because I don't even remember seeing cement. I thought it was just dry rock that they were using.

And there were no straight lines there. I guess some of the walls of these homes were somewhat straight, but they really weren't. So it's not as though they used a level, or as though they used any kind of a measuring tape.

But what happened is that these homes fit into these itty-bitty yards that were fenced in by the rock, and the fencing in the homes then blended into the little itty-bitty roadways. There were no cars. It's just roadways for them to be able to walk on and for them to be able to wheel something with, like a carriage that—I don't mean a horse and carriage, but a carriage that could be pulled with two wheels. So it was a whole conglomerate that looked—it just looked so fine to me—

MS. RICHARDS: Pretty organic.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —in that it was so organic, so humane, so belonging to human beings, so unintellectual. Now, that's not to say that the community was happy there, or that they liked it, or that they had toilets that flushed, or that—I don't know what else went on.

It just visually felt more normal than what we have going on, especially in places like Manhattan, where you have to point your head upward in order to see the sky. And the hard, relentlessly hard edges, and especially the corporate look—I find to be really hard to be around.

I guess there are ways of preserving one's self, but people that work in these corporate settings—though they be so clean and so sterile, and though they even have huge windows through which sunlight can come in, but still—they're so lacking in the kind of nest-like environment that humans might need.

It's the opposite—in order to, I guess, look chic and professional, and I think that it has a greater look of authority behind it, which this little village I'm describing had very little of—none of, really.

MS. RICHARDS: Right. You talked about the corporate aesthetic. You've done at least two fairly major commissions, one for Bloomberg and one for Microsoft and maybe others. Maybe this is a good time to talk about commissions. Just one more question about method, then maybe we'll be taking a break for lunch, and then we could talk about commissions.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Sure. But we still have time, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Lunch is noon?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Noon. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. Titling—how does that happen? Do you think of the title even sometimes before you've made the piece, or is it a struggle? How does that whole thing happen with finding titles?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Titles are a big pain in the butt. Periodically, they're pleasure, when I can poke [at] little funny things, or that I think are funny, with my title. But often you have to differentiate one piece from another, because they indeed are different entities, and you need it for their history, for their future.

They need to have their own title, their own name, their own identity. You can't go *Untitled 357*. It's not possible. And once in a while I come up with good titles—like, I think *Ene Due Rabe* is a good title. *Oj Dana Oj Dana* is a good title. I think *Umarles*, which means "You went and died"—I think that's a good title.

But sometimes my titles are not so good, and I just have to tolerate it. Sometimes I go through three titles, and they actually get put into the catalogue, and they actually get sent out and shown under that [last title. If I -UVR] just can't stand it anymore, I take the title off—

MS. RICHARDS: So you change them.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —and I change them.

MS. RICHARDS: Would a title that you're not too pleased be with be the kind of title that's just—I'm making this up—*Five Bowls*? Something that's not very descriptive. Is that—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Actually—

MS. RICHARDS: —one negative, or is it something else?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No. Actually, the descriptive ones are more neutral, and I don't feel so bad about them. It's just that the problem with them is that are *Five Bowls* five bowls? *Five Bowls*, I hope, are not just five bowls.

MS. RICHARDS: Right. So it's limiting, in a sense.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It's five bowls and limiting, in a sense. Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Now, if you want to not limit, you want people to see the title and—do you want the title to just simply be something that identifies that piece, or do you want it to be —reading the title, for the viewer—part of the experience of learning about the piece?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I know just what you're saying—that there are some titles that—

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. So, and in that sense, if you put a title that's a Polish word that I don't know what it means, would you imagine putting the translation? Or is it okay for you that the viewer really doesn't know what that means, and it doesn't detract from their experience?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I sometimes put Polish words actually deliberately not to pin down the meaning of the piece, because I think the viewer often takes more cues than they should from the title.

And the viewer often thinks that by reading the title, that through that title, they can have an "in" to the piece, to enable them to understand it.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And I'm so not a believer in that.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. That's why some artists do say just "*Untitled*" because they don't want to dictate an experience.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right. Well, I somehow think the Polish word is better than "*Untitled*" because "*Untitled*," in a sense, orphans the piece in my head, whereas a Polish word at least identifies it specifically.

Sometimes I do have the Polish translation if I want to, but sometimes I don't. *Oddychająca* means "the breathing of a woman," but I made up that word. It's a Polish word that I made up, and it indicates there's something about that piece that has to do with the lung part of the chest, and there's something about a little wave sort of letting itself go.

I'm being way too literal. I'm being stupid now—do you know what I mean—in the way that I'm talking about it. But there's something about that piece that, for me, connects it with a woman's breathing. That's all, really. But you can't translate that without being that long-winded, because then I think it just becomes something that is not even a title. It's a further explanation that's going to really be taken seriously. So I didn't translate that one.

In *Luba*, I think there's almost in the sound of that word, you can feel what it means, so there's no translation there. But "*luba*" means "a beloved" or someone that's loved who is a female—*luba*. Actually, I knew a dog named Luba. Not that that's a dog but—and one of the most offensive things I heard, and I don't even know if I want to repeat this, but from a woman who looked at my piece, *Luba*, at Storm King, and her first reaction was—and I was standing there, and she asked me, "Oh, is this a coffee cup?" And how she got a coffee cup out of that one, I can't quite understand. But it is what it is, and she got what she got.

But anyway, titles really have their problems, and I really do need to take them seriously. And sometimes I do and sometimes I don't. Sometimes I just can't squeeze it out.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you involve your husband or your assistants or anyone in that?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Never. Never. Never. And when I involve my husband, he comes up with some great Shakespearian thing. It just—oh, my God, there's no way I would ever do that. Like he wants it to sound really scholarly and knowing.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you ever bring him into the studio and ask his—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: On a regular basis?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And ask his opinion?

MS. RICHARDS: Well, have him see the work in progress for his own pleasure and interest?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: He—yes, I do that. I never ask for his opinion.

MS. RICHARDS: And he doesn't give it?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Even if he gives it—[laughs]—I hear it, but I don't necessarily at all abide, because this really is my world.

[End of Track.]

MS. RICHARDS: Beginning after a pause—I think I asked about your travels, and you commented about places you had been that I didn't even realize you had been.

You said you've been to Japan several times, and I asked about how those experiences of different cultures, and different cultures from different periods of time, filtered into your work, because obviously those are visual experiences and cultural experiences that you seek out that nurture your work.

Are you conscious of how those things may come into your work, or what it is actually that you are finding and feeding off of creatively?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think it's impossible for me to tell just how the things that I look at filter into my work. But there are real signs that when I see something that I like, it becomes undeniable. And "like" is maybe a strange word, but that really interests me. Maybe it's better to say that.

And again, I think a lot of things interest me; a lot of things really interest me. But I think many of them never really enter my work. But I don't know for sure. I think if they do, they go through some kind of a morphing in my brain that comes out in ways that certainly are not easily identified. But I know I'm giving you a general answer.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, let's look at a piece specifically. There's a piece—when is it—from 1996, *Ocean Floor*.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And it's a large piece. It's kind of an interestingly horizontal piece that might actually—you might think of an ocean floor sometimes, although the sides are built up.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: And you've used the cow intestines to create these pairs of forms that dangle from the lip all around. To me, they reference different cultures. I don't know if it's anything specific. It could be African. It could be Oceanic. It could be something else.

But there seem to be elements of something that's timeless. Of course, that relates to a lot of your work, and that's a quality, I guess, everyone sees in ancient or early art that has been preserved and still is there for us to see—that there's some kind of timelessness to it that every artist, I imagine, would love to have seen in their own work.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: But thinking about *Ocean Floor*, are you conscious of references to other cultural objects or landscapes that you've seen?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think of it as just being one of my more primitive pieces and I like primitive, in that there is something that feels very familiar to me, the arena of the primitive. I don't even know what that means when I say it. But I think the word you're using about timelessness and the word—that is something that feels attractive to me, not that I think I actually achieve it.

It's probably really difficult. First of all, again, I don't really know what "timelessness" means, but that I am attracted to African art, and the more ancient, the better. I am attracted to—I have many, many Japanese teacups—I'm sorry, they're not teacups. They're cast-iron tea kettles, teapots.

And some of the cast iron is made in two molds—one that's at the bottom and one that's at the top of the teapot, which rolls over or leaks over the mold at the bottom. They are so simple, and you can tell that these are the things that people—ordinary people—used.

These are the cheapest, but they're the ones that feel the most attractive to me—in a sense, the most honest. And that they're not, through that teapot, trying to prove that they're rich, or trying to prove that they're powerful.

I feel as though it is that kind of a pruned look, that is pruned of a kind—elitism. It's pruned of an overly bloated ego, or even being pruned of an ego like that village that I described to you that I saw in Guatemala, and that it is pruned of any kind of proselytizing.

But that's hard to figure out, because often the objects that were made long ago were, in fact, deeply religious, or they had to do with a sense of ritual that was truly embraced, in terms of just feeling that you couldn't survive without it. It was truly an imperative part of their lives, and there's something so honest about things that belong to a culture that's some of our beginning cultures.

And that's not to say that I'm depleting it. I'm sure I'm idealizing it. That's not to say that it's without violence, or jealousy, or vengeance, or all the things that we consider negative, which really are not. They are who we are. They're a part of all of us. They are human qualities. And these are also incorporated in many of the works that I like. I guess what I envy, from the medieval culture, but I say it in a way that's kind of a lie, is the deep belief, the direct road to God. That is that they believed so clearly that He existed, that He had these qualities.

And that He was willing to sacrifice Himself for them, even though He had qualities that had to do with power, that had to do with ego, that had to do with jealousy, that you couldn't have any other lords before you, only Him. Loyalty He demanded. I mean, He was very demanding.

But that this story could be embraced as being something that was so pivotal to your life, would simplify your life enormously, and that you would focus on whatever happened after, that believing in all of this would make you feel as though you were doing the right thing if you, in fact, followed those dictates. And actually those dictates are not so easy to follow, when it comes to controlling your own mental wanderings—like jealousy is a sin; anger is a sin; feeling anger and wishing somebody dead is a sin.

In other words, things that are really difficult to control, much more difficult than swearing and not going to church or things that are sort of outwardly manifested, or beating somebody up.

But still part of me envies what it would be like to have existed in the medieval ages. But it's totally ridiculous, because it was probably a kind of a chained existence that offered very, very few options.

I don't even know why I'm going into this, except that that purity of belief, and I guess—I guess if I had a religion, it was that I believe that through art things can be done, but not the kind of things that religion does. But that through art we can mobilize things that count in a big way, just through the awakening of what one can take in visually, thereby mentally, really.

It's the only way I know. I'm not even pretending that I can do that or that that's what I do. I'm not. But I just have such a strong belief in the possibility of its being potent in giving gifts that are rooted in all the right things, and that the best of art doesn't idealize necessarily at all.

The best of art doesn't cover over all of the hard things in life. And the best of art for me has a credibility in the sense of its being honest in assessing things that are difficult to look at or difficult to face or to talk about. But I think, again, I'm way oversimplifying.

[END SD 3.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Ursula von Rydingsvard on November 17, 2011, in her studio in Brooklyn [NY], for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc four.

We were just talking about the piece *Ocean Floor* and about references to ancient cultures and the spiritual and ideas about God. Is there anything else you wanted to add to that before we go on to the next subject?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, in reference to the *Ocean Floor*, that the charge I had from Exit Art, this is for whom I made the piece.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, so this is a later show, because—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It wasn't the show. It was a later show, exactly.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I see.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It was a group show, and I just had only that piece in it. And apparently they wanted something that was more of a participatory piece that people could either crawl into or somehow react to, whatever humans did with it.

In this case I made a floor on that piece that reverberated your voice in ways that were very different, depending on whether you spoke at the very bottom of the bowl, and then you lifted your body up and spoke in the middle part, and then the upper part, that it echoed and the sound of the voice was considerably different.

And it was not only a participatory piece, but it had to have something to do with sound. And of course, I really made no pretenses that I could do anything that's really that worthwhile with sound. However, I do like—I did make one piece that's based on sound; that's *Mama Your Legs*.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, I was going to ask you about that.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. So just staying with the *Ocean Floor* for a little bit longer, that that's in part what motivated those rippling circles around the inside of that bowl.

But then I think that the more ritually oriented part happened with the sacks that I sewed around the outside, that have peat moss on the inside—and I really meant that to be earth, but earth would be too heavy—peat moss on the inside, inside of a bag that was sewn of muslin.

It was hand sewn, because they're nice and curved with some sisal thin rope that had the muslin sewn around that as well, so that it would keep the two appendages, the two pendants, the hangings, together. They would be bound in couples with this rope.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And then I sewed intestine, the fourth stomach of a cow, around both of the [hanging pendants -UvR].

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, hanging things.

[They laugh.]

[Audio break.]

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: So that these pendants were actually coupled one with the other. They came in pairs. And they were placed into niches on the top part of the bowl. Each one had its own home. Each one had its own cave, its own nest, however one wants to see it.

And each of these pendants, these organic round pendants, felt like they were in different sizes. They felt quite—and you could feel the intestine around. It was clear that the [pendants were] made with a very, very thin skin. And I then graphited [them] while the skin was still wet, so that the graphite actually went into the pores of the wet skin before I put them into their little niches.

MS. RICHARDS: When you talked about participatory, do you mean people were allowed to climb into the piece? I think about those pendants being so fragile.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: You couldn't be more right. At the opening, I actually had a staircase—because it had to be a participatory piece on either side—which I took out immediately after the show, a staircase.

And they would come in by huge group-loads, and then they would start shaking the piece so it would rock, and they would be holding onto those very fragile handles that were made out of the cow's intestine. So it was, for me, an idea for a show that stunk, but it was a mobilizing force that for me made one of my important pieces.

So life has a way of taking you on detours, but then ending up [with] detours that are really distasteful, but then ending up with something that works.

MS. RICHARDS: So now, when that piece is exhibited, as you said it is right now, it's not allowed to be entered?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, no one can enter it. No one can touch it.

MS. RICHARDS: Good.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It's the one that a guard has to stand beside the entire time so no one touches the intestines, because it's tantalizing to do that. They want to see what it is.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. So now, you mentioned *Mama Your Legs*, which I wanted to talk about. But before that, in 1997—I don't know if this is something interesting or not—you installed a piece in the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, near where Henry Moore lived, in 1997. I'm not sure which piece it was. You installed a group of outdoor works.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I had a show and exhibition.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that the first time you had an exhibition of works outside the U.S.?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think it is.

MS. RICHARDS: And is that something that was—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I had something at Studio Bassanese, but they were just drawings many years ago. But this is the first major.

MS. RICHARDS: Where is that, Bassanese —

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: In [Trieste] Italy, and this was the first major exhibition.

MS. RICHARDS: Was this particularly meaningful that it was near where Henry Moore had lived, or not?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah. Well, I like many of Henry Moore's pieces, but I'm not a huge, huge fan. I really like the way he used limbs of animals and how he negotiated them. But the land of Yorkshire Sculpture Park is just astonishingly beautiful. It belonged to a single guy whose manor still stands there.

It's land that's carved up into what seemed like land of different people that owned it at one time. And the way

that land is divided in Europe, you can tell that it took many, many, many, many generations and many years in order to divide it this well.

That somehow the stone fencing that differentiates one parcel of land that belongs to one farmer as opposed to another just makes so much sense—that border for being there. But beyond that, it's a place that has sheep grazing, cows grazing, and that has many layers of terrain, some of which go up high.

In fact, I'm just thinking of it now, that at one time during one of my visits—I've had many visits there, but during one of the times that I had my exhibition up, I was thinking of the possibility of making an enormous bowl that from England faced the United States, and it was up on the highest portion of Yorkshire Sculpture Park.

But it was the highest portion that had an encrusted rock background that felt almost like a half of a bowl. And I would have built the other half of the bowl, that would be facing, say, New York City instead of United States.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that a dream that might be possible?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It never happened. No, it never happened and I don't think it's going to be possible, because the suspension of that bowl would have had to have been then supported, and that support would have ruined the look.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: But I'm simplifying why I didn't do it. It was very difficult also to append to these rocks, and these rocks [were not grounded enough -UvR]—but I have a feeling all this stuff could have been overcome. I have a feeling all of it could have been overcome. But I think the funding is difficult—just like I have another project that's in the works for Yorkshire Sculpture Park that I dream about all the time.

MS. RICHARDS: I'm going to ask you about that near the end.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It's not going to happen.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, when we come to the present.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Okay, later.

MS. RICHARDS: Soon.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right, okay.

MS. RICHARDS: *Mama Your Legs*, that piece—unique I think, or maybe there's one other I read about that had sound—where you launch into a very new approach for you, all these mechanical moving parts. What was the goal? What was the question? What was the issue that you were exploring in that piece that brought you to that resolution?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, I wanted to hear the sound through the movement of wood against wood, but it had to be very particular, in that there is a hinge on the lower part of the steel pipe that holds up the structure that is going inside of the bowls. And that structure is a circular structure that actually came out—that was carved out of [the inside of -UvR] that bowl.

So it goes back into it. But it goes back into it by bumping up against the top lip of the bowl, by hitting up against the bottom and then bumping up against the top lip of the back part of the bowl, and then it goes up [all the way -UvR]. And they all do it at different moments. They all hit the bottom of their lips at different moments.

They do it slowly. But the sound it makes and the echoes it makes because of the [bowl -UvR] chamber that they're coming into just feels great. But there's obviously also a look, having this heavy mechanical structure up above, and what that does to the wood.

And it's all almost—[a] preindustrial look, that's put on something that even goes way back, in terms of the bowls and what they look like and the thing that goes into the bowl.

It's a humble mechanical look. It's not a "See what I can do." It's a mechanical look that struggles to do what it does, even though it does it. It's a mechanical look that isn't particularly smooth in the way that it functions.

I remember clearly that it was one of the moments in the studio where there was a tremendous amount of excitement, because the guys had the green light as to how to engineer this work, how to make what I wanted to do work. So there was a lot of excitement about figuring that out, because it's actually a good bit of weight that gets lifted.

At one time there wasn't that much construction on the top, so that the bars were really burdened under the weight. And in time, I had somebody during an entire summer who was mechanically very gifted redo the whole top, so that it could, in fact, lift those [cutouts from the center of these bowls -UvR]. They're almost like those wooden potato mashers—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —without the stem that goes with it.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And the stem would just be the pipe that comes out of it with that link that would enable that pipe to jiggle. I call it its "neck," before it gets sunken into the bowl and up again.

MS. RICHARDS: So did you feel that piece gave you what you wanted it to give you?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't know if any piece ever gives me what I want it to give me totally.

MS. RICHARDS: It sounds like—you love the sound. It wasn't something that you continued.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No.

MS. RICHARDS: So the sound you loved, but the mechanism, the metal—visually, the metal mechanism was about two-thirds or three-quarters of the visual experience of the piece. It overwhelmed the wood.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't think it overwhelmed the wood, because the wood had the mass, even though it was on the floor.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: But the rest of it was—you could see through it. It was so airy.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It was thin, thin, thin, like blinds.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Were you tempted to do another piece with sound or to take that mechanism, that part of the piece, and transmute it to another piece?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No. I only did one other sound piece, but that was a much less elaborate piece.

MS. RICHARDS: That was just a lid, right?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, but it was quite a heavy lid. It had a real sound when it went up, and then it would move its back up and then down again. So it wasn't a simple lifting and lowering and lifting and lowering.

It wasn't like a horizontal lid that was exactly horizontal, and it went up and then went down, went up and then down. It lifted its front lip up, which means the back went down, and then as the front lip went down on the edge of its container, the back went up just very slightly and then down again. So in a sense, for me, it was a kind of breathing of that container.

MS. RICHARDS: It sounds like it was successful, in your mind.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think it was successful. I think that *Mama Your Legs* was more successful. And I think that was a real adventure for me and for my guys.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think you'll do that again?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't think I'm going to do that again, no. But maybe I'll do another moving piece again. I don't know. I don't see it. But maybe I will.

MS. RICHARDS: You've done a number of commissions, public and private, and I'm guessing that after you did the piece at Capp Street that Ann Hatch invited you to do, then maybe it was because of that that the Olivers—Steve and Nancy Oliver—invited you to do the piece at their ranch.

And then you did a piece at Microsoft. I've seen you doing corporate pieces, private pieces. Then you did the piece in 2005 at [the] Bloomberg [Building, NY]. A kind of a general question—do you apply for commissions, or if you're invited to apply, do you apply and therefore risk being rejected or not invited?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: Or do you just do commissions when you're specifically—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I care not much about being rejected. I do commissions. A gallery will periodically call me and say, "Would you be interested in this piece, in doing this in this place?" I say, "Sure, go ahead and submit whatever they want."

MS. RICHARDS: So the gallery does that?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: The gallery does that. But I don't think that they do that that often. Sometimes I also just get asked. Like Steve Oliver just asked me. All the private people just ask me.

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And the Percentage for Art program or competitions.

MS. RICHARDS: Can you generalize that public commissions are different in certain ways from the private commissions, or gratifying in different ways, or less gratifying? Is there a consistent difference between a public commission and a private commission?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: A private commission—I basically have people that have followed my work for a long time, and there's a trust. So that when it comes to telling them what it is that I'm going to do for them, I basically choose a site, and then I bring a couple of catalogues and I say, "A little of this and a little of that," and somehow they believe me, because I'm not even sure myself what it is that I want.

And then if I sit on the land, often things come, but not so completely or not so clearly, as in the case of the Oliver Ranch. I found the spot. It didn't take much, and it had an incredible view, and I liked it because of its view and because it had a hillside whose curve I liked a lot. I ended up actually cutting into that hillside.

So it made a kind of shelf for my wedges. I had a retaining wall made out of cement for that hillside that was exactly the color of the earth so that the land wouldn't avalanche onto my piece. And I made nine wedges, that are still there and are doing very well, out of cedar. We actually built the whole thing on-site. It was a real accomplishment.

Charles Juhasz-Alvarado was the one that ran—he was the head that ran that operation. But obviously, I was there the entire time [... -UvR].

MS. RICHARDS: So you were there for a year or more?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, no, no. I was there for maybe three months, something like that.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I see. The whole thing took a year or so.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Because when we work—we hired a whole lot of people. So we really worked very intensively. We worked all the days, all the hours that were humanly possible to work. And sometimes the temperature would reach 110 degrees during the day. But we had a lot of people from Mexico that worked with us—some women, some men—who were able to endure this.

But we all endured it. We all worked under these conditions. I just remember it was quite wonderful. And I remember one of the Mexican women singing songs underneath her mask, Mexican songs, that were wonderful. I also remember making a little retirement home in the side of one of those wedges.

MS. RICHARDS: A retirement home?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: For myself, yeah, Sonoma Valley. It's beautiful, beautiful, beautiful.

MS. RICHARDS: What does it look like, the retirement—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, it's like a little indentation that's round and cozy-looking. But it's not enough to—

MS. RICHARDS: You could sit there.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It would fit my hand. No, I can't sit there. It would fit my hand, I guess.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I see.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: So it was not that obvious to anyone but me. And I had the entire crew print their

names in huge [letters -UvR]—burn their names in on the side of one of the wedges, so it's evident to the world who participated.

MS. RICHARDS: Wow. And when you do a private commission, though, of course, not too many people will see it.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, in this case—

MS. RICHARDS: Well, I know they have people all the time.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah, they do.

MS. RICHARDS: But in most private commissions—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: In fact, it's taken over his life so much that he had to try to minimize it. That's Steve Oliver.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: He would take them on tours.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, I was the lucky recipient of one of those tours.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's great; that's great.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, maybe—well, yeah, your piece was there. So he's cutting back on that?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think so, because it was four full days a week, and people would come into his home and lay on the bed, and people would get lost. But it's not just that. It just took a lot of time because he's very [generous -UvR]—wanting to share what he did.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yes, yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And he handed it over to the county now. Well, not that they're taking care of it, but they will. I think they might even own it now, all the people.

MS. RICHARDS: The county?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah, all the works, yes. So I think that's—

MS. RICHARDS: They're—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It's a foundation, or it's something whereby—I think he probably left them money in order to be able to maintain this work, and he probably has some people set up that really understand it.

MS. RICHARDS: I think he must have thought those things through. If you just left it to a government entity, you might not be certain that—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, you can't. You would never be certain. The government knows nothing about art, nor do they care.

MS. RICHARDS: It might not be a priority.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And then to leave it to your children, it would just be punitive, punitive, punitive. It would be their albatross for them to have to look after that—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —because they have children too. So it's not as though—

MS. RICHARDS: Were you excited about doing the Bloomberg commission? It's in this steel/glass skyscraper, although an interesting one.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I was. It's a Cesar Pelli building, and it is hard-edged.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you pick that wonderful corridor, or was it just one of many options they gave you?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's what they wanted, something for the [lobby -UvR].

MS. RICHARDS: Lobby/corridor. It's a lobby, but it's a long space too.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, lobby/corridor. That's correct. That's right. I was excited because I could make something that's voluptuous and that wanders.

MS. RICHARDS: And it's very long.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It's very long, 88 feet, six inches. And it's got a beautiful view from both sides of the ends, in that these craggy edges of the vessels—the top edges overlap one another in a way, so that you're looking at some sort of a Chinese mountainscape that overlaps.

MS. RICHARDS: With a commission like that, could you avoid making models and showing them drawings?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I didn't do much.

MS. RICHARDS: You had to give them a budget, or they gave you a budget?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: They gave me a budget. And I showed them on top of—just a piece of paper, some sort of overlays of structures that I just cut out of other works that I put flatly up against a wall. It didn't really look a whole lot like what they received. But they were apparently happy enough with it to give me the go-ahead.

MS. RICHARDS: And did you need to have monthly—or moments during the process where you had to report on the progress and show images or do anything like that?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: The Public Art Fund actually gave it to me.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And they would come here.

MS. RICHARDS: They were the ones who were responsible.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: For a moment, yes. You can put that off.

[Audio break.]

MS. RICHARDS: So overall, that was a positive experience?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It was really a positive experience, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you involved in explaining—that's not quite the right word—but talking about the piece to Bloomberg executives or any employees of Bloomberg?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I was. They invited me once to do that, and it was during their lunchtime. Everybody brings a paper bag. And I guess they even hand you a paper bag if you want to sit there during lunch and listen to an artist speak on their art. And I think that the audience was fine.

But the visuals that I had to work with were—just astonished me. There were five squares that were on a huge white panel. And these five squares were projected. Two of the five squares had huge letters—Bloomberg—and the second square had Bloomberg letters, and then the third square had "Bloomberg," huge.

And then the other three I worked with. So on the other three squares were projected my piece—that piece I talked about. But I also talked about some of my previous pieces. And the projections were so unclear. I don't know whether it's because they project mostly statistics and written things and numbers on top of the things, and not anything that has to do with actual pictures or—

MS. RICHARDS: And you didn't have an opportunity to correct it before you'd start your talk? Just went up there when you—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, I spoke to them so many times [before my lecture -UvR]. And I assumed that they had tremendously good equipment, which they must, for whatever it is that they do, because they have meetings there and they project things all the time.

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Anyway, that was so—

MS. RICHARDS: —surprising.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Surprising and disappointing, because when I speak, that's what I have to lean on, [the

visuals -UvR]. I'm talking to them about what it is that they can see, and what they're looking at is so unclear, and it's got edges that shouldn't be there, like darkened edges.

The whole thing was very strange. And yet somehow the people that did the video didn't think anything was so strange. I don't understand the people that were working the projectors.

MS. RICHARDS: It makes me think—Charlie Rose has a studio there in that building.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: He does, on the ground floor, on the bottom floor.

MS. RICHARDS: Did he ever interview you or talk to you?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, no. I don't think he does it with artists very much. I don't think that that's his forte.

MS. RICHARDS: No, I've seen him interview Richard Serra.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And art historians, like—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: —what's his name, who did the de Kooning show.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: John Elderfield.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, not too many artists. He should.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: He did John Elderfield just recently.

MS. RICHARDS: I think so, yeah. I think he's had other curators on.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: But he should do artists.

I wanted to ask you about the Madison Square Park work that you did, in polyurethane? Polyurethane resin, which was the first time you used that, I believe.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And it was a huge risk, I imagine.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: A huge leap of faith to commit yourself to doing this piece in this public venue.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: But it turned out incredibly well and gave you possibilities—introduced elements like light in your work that you didn't have before. So I wanted to ask you about your experience of conceiving that piece and working through the challenges of a new medium.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And how you felt about the results.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I felt so excited, much like I felt so excited about the use of the co-polyethylene that I used for the piece at the Queens Family Court House, the Pei, Cobb and Freed building that they were building. [The piece is -UvR] in the atrium.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: So this piece—

MS. RICHARDS: And that was just a little bit before—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: *Damski Czepek* was one that I got enough money to be able to do this, for which I was so grateful that I was able to experiment, I was able to reach out this way, because the urethane costs as much as bronze.

MS. RICHARDS: Does it?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And it's very, very dense material. It's very durable outdoors. So I knew I had to make a structure. And I actually postponed that exhibition by an entire year.

MS. RICHARDS: In Madison Square?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Madison Square Park—exhibition, by an entire year. I had to make a structure that one could walk into. But I didn't want to walk into darkness as you would if it were cedar. So I had to figure out another material. And it was the urethane that I used.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you see that urethane being used, whether in someone else's artwork or some other structure, that prompted you to know that it would work in the case of this piece you were conceiving for Madison Square?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's a good question. You want to put this thing off?

[Audio break.]

What I wanted was a material that was very dense, that the weather would not hurt and that was translucent. Because I deliberately wanted to set up this piece that I was going to build in a way so that the sun rising in the east would cast its light on it, and it would set in the west, just given that the buildings there are so high that you're not going to get a lot of the sun.

It still worked, because there was an open space. I'm just going to go into the making of it now. I made the entire bonnet—this is the *Damski Czepek*—out of cedar first, full scale, and I made the two sleeves that came out of *Damski Czepek* also out of cedar first.

I was consulting with a fabricating plant—Walla Walla—where Dylan Farnum was the person in charge of making the mold and doing the pour. It's an extremely complicated material to use, and it's extremely lethal in [its liquid form -UvR]. And you have to have very special equipment.

You have to have a double boiler, in a sense, that's enormous, in order to make this urethane reach a certain temperature so that it can be poured, so it can be poured into the molds. And they're used to making molds at Walla Walla because they make so many things out of bronze.

So they made it just as strong, and reinforced by a lot of rebars and a lot of steel tubing or square tubing, that would reinforce the strength of these walls that they poured this urethane into. I think they did a great job, and I think that the top part of *Damski Czepek* is a piece that has—that's probably the biggest single urethane pour that's ever been made, because urethane pours—you have to make them in sections.

And then we made more sections around the *Damski Czepek*. But that was huge, the part that had the overhang of the *Damski Czepek* that would kind of move more than any other part that hung over the piece.

MS. RICHARDS: Move, in the sense of the forms—the curved forms move, not that it physically moves.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, it doesn't physically move, but the edge of the bonnet that's supposed to be providing the shade—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, undulates.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —was the most agitated part, and it was the part that sort of caught the sun in ways that were sometimes more interesting, because it moved so heavily, not physically, but it moved in the way that I built it out of cedar.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm, Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Have you thought about using that material again since then?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I'm thinking, yes—I did a small piece that's in England, in Petworth. And then I did another piece that was commissioned by the deCordova Museum that's called *Elegantka*.

MS. RICHARDS: I think I have that some place, so—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And now I'm hoping to make another one. But I need to get the funding for it. I'm making it out of cedar, actually, with some kind of hope that this will be possible. We'll see; we'll see.

MS. RICHARDS: I know I saw in the video that you did of the creation of the piece for the Queens Courthouse, created an entire piece out of cedar.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's right.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, to the gluing, everything.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, everything.

MS. RICHARDS: And then making the mold from that piece, and once you finished it, and made it—poured in polyurethane. I guess then that wooden piece still survives. But it's just a relic. It's not a piece, right?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's right.

MS. RICHARDS: Just evidence of the process.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's right.

MS. RICHARDS: Can you reuse the wood?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I can't reuse it, no.

MS. RICHARDS: It's all glued—no.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Could you make another mold if you wanted to duplicate the piece?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I could make another mold if I wanted to duplicate the piece. That's right.

MS. RICHARDS: You've never done a piece as a multiple, have you? A sculptural piece?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I never have, but I want to. I want to. But I've been wanting to for 20 years and it's never happened. But I still want to. Wouldn't it be great to have another *Damski Czepek* at some other location?

MS. RICHARDS: Sure. So what's preventing it happening?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It's finances.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, okay.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: But I suppose, if there's a demand, that it will happen.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you've made a piece like that, do you still own it, or has someone bought it?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, I still own the wooden part.

MS. RICHARDS: No, I mean, the *Damski Czepek*.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, that piece. I don't know, because Madison Square Park funded it.

MS. RICHARDS: That doesn't mean they own it.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, but it's been traveling. It went to Sweden for two years, and now it's at Yorkshire Sculpture Park. So I don't know how they divvy it up.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. But I guess the question is—it doesn't matter who owns it, but if someone did own it, they would have been told that it could become one of two or one of three.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I see what you're saying, right.

MS. RICHARDS: If they were told it was unique, then you might have an issue going off and making a second one.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Exactly, exactly.

MS. RICHARDS: But if that's open-ended, then there's no problem. Have you seen it in all those other locations?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, yes; oh, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: That's been a positive experience?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Everything is mixed. But yes, it looked beautiful in Sweden. The look was good. I haven't seen it yet in England, because they just installed it two weeks ago.

MS. RICHARDS: At this point, I want to ask you—after the commissions, ask you questions—you talked about the gallery dealing with some commissions for you, the public ones. So I wanted to ask you about your relationship with galleries. It's always a challenge, in my experience, for a sculptor.

You have so many issues for a gallery to deal with—storage and the installation and the expenses that they know you're incurring. You had a show, a very early one in 1977, you mentioned, at 55 Mercer Street—Mercer Gallery. And as time went by, you had one or two shows—two shows with Rosa Esman. Did you want to stay with Rosa Esman, or was that never to be a permanent relationship?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think one of the people that worked for Rosa Esman started her own gallery. So I went there for a couple of years.

MS. RICHARDS: That was Bette Stoler.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Bette Stoler, that's right.

MS. RICHARDS: I see. And then that gallery closed?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: And then you had a couple of shows with Lorence-Monk, at Lorence-Monk Gallery.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's right; that's right.

MS. RICHARDS: But then that gallery stopped, right?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's right.

MS. RICHARDS: This must have been frustrating to be in galleries that—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —didn't work.

MS. RICHARDS: —didn't work, and then—what was your approach to finding representation?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think I never looked, really, that they asked me. All these people asked me. I think Robert Monk came to me at the Exit Art show and asked me if wanted to join the gallery.

MS. RICHARDS: That was '88, and your first show there was '90.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's right; that's right.

MS. RICHARDS: Was he the only one who came to you?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I believe so. I think people are afraid to show the kind of work that I make.

MS. RICHARDS: It's challenging.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: The sales are so difficult.

MS. RICHARDS: You'll get fantastic, I think, critical attention. You'll get audience. But—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It's really hard.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: So after my show, I had a single-person show at Storm King Art [Center]. And that was, I believe, '91, '92.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It was for two years.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: There's a person that told Mary Sabbatino to go see the show at Storm King, and his first name is Fred [Matys Thursz]. I'm sorry I can't think of his last name. He's dead. And [Mary did see the exhibition -UvR], and then I've been with her since 1992.

MS. RICHARDS: Right, you had a show there in '94 and '97 and 2000, and also shows in their other galleries in Zurich.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's right, and Paris.

MS. RICHARDS: How has the response been to your work in those other locations as compared to New York? I'm talking about audience and criticism and other artists, not sales, but the response to the work, because your work hasn't been shown that much outside.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, I think that the audience—no, it hasn't been—that the audience and the criticism and attention have been far, far greatest here in New York City. That's not to say that I didn't get a good review, and a long review, at the deCordova Museum as well as the Cleveland Museum of Art, with a guy that was very sensitive that wrote pretty well.

MS. RICHARDS: And Zurich and Paris?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, I just don't even think that there was an audience, or the audience you could count on one hand. And it's not as though—the people on this one hand were not very elegant. But I don't think anybody really had—in terms of purchases, they were almost nonexistent in both of these places, Zurich and Paris.

MS. RICHARDS: I think that the audiences there don't have much of a background in your work.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, they don't.

MS. RICHARDS: Your work—it's interesting, it's been shown in museums, major museums. It's owned by major museums all over the U.S. But it hasn't been included in—it's big and heavy, so maybe those are the answers—but it hasn't been included in the big European biennials.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Exactly, never. Exactly.

MS. RICHARDS: Right. I don't know how to put this question. But it's kind of a puzzling situation. I think that people who do major, large, heavy sculpture often—that's kind of a block.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't know. It's not something I can control, I guess.

MS. RICHARDS: Sure, sure. You've had the opportunity with [Galerie] Lelong to have your work seen there and build up—it'll gradually build up.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And you've always kept your own archives, I presume. The gallery keeps what they need to keep, but you've always taken the approach of being the main repository, or history, of your work.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's correct.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you get involved, when you do have shows, in deciding on the image for the announcement, on the writing or the okaying of the press release, the verbal description?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I'm usually sort of fanatical about the visuals that they use. But the gallery has not used visuals lately. In fact, the gallery has not sent out invitations. They email. They do something with the email that they mail out.

MS. RICHARDS: So they don't print invitations anymore?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, they did. I guess they printed some for me for the older—because there's an older contingency that really doesn't use the computers like the—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. That's right.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —other people do.

MS. RICHARDS: When you have a show, do you create contracts or written stipulations for purchasers about the how and where and under what conditions the work can be installed, and, obviously, you have to say whether something can be put outdoors or if it must remain indoors.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't. I probably should, but I haven't.

MS. RICHARDS: And that if it needed to be moved, that you would be required to supervise the move, or you would be required to approve the art handlers. I don't know how subject to damage the work might be if they were moving residences. Or if you do an installation—an outdoor permanent piece in someone's property; I saw one in Connecticut—what happens if they sell the house? Do you have something in writing about what happens?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't. I've never had a contract with anybody that I sold to.

MS. RICHARDS: So, obviously, you haven't had any bad experiences that would make you need to have a contract.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, no, no. That's not to say that. But I haven't had a contract.

MS. RICHARDS: So it's not something that the gallery is—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —encouraging?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, because, if anything, it undermines the sale. The more conditions you put on it, the more hesitant the people are going to be to buy it.

MS. RICHARDS: I assume that—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And I'm a real believer that no matter what you have in the contract—do I really want to police it to see that they follow through with what they signed up for? How is it controlled after the contract?

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I have no contract with my dealer either. It's totally based on trust.

MS. RICHARDS: That's very common.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And I do trust her and she trusts me.

MS. RICHARDS: When you finish a piece and it goes out of the studio, do you give the gallery instructions—let's say, this is to be hung on the wall at this point, at eye level, or it should never—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, I'm there during the entire installation.

MS. RICHARDS: But when they sell it, people need to know—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, I see what you're saying.

MS. RICHARDS: Or if it gets lent to a museum exhibition, it might come with installation instructions.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, yes, we have a lot of installation instructions, exactly. The shovels are at a certain height.

MS. RICHARDS: Or if it's on the floor, they should be on a plinth, or they should never be—this must be straight on the floor.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Never on a pedestal, right.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Exactly, or you can't wash anywhere near it; no water can come close; no one can touch it because the oil off of your hands—

MS. RICHARDS: Right, and—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: But I'm generally pretty—I don't know—lean a lot on just trust, and the fact that they really wanted this work, and that they paid for this work, and that I have—one of my people actually maintains some of that work, because you're supposed to spray it every other year with a wood preservative.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, what do you mean someone maintains?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Sean; Sean periodically—

MS. RICHARDS: So he contacts the owners?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. But we've only had to do this, I think, to two people, because there are two people that have outdoor artworks. Otherwise, the museums obviously take care of their own. Microsoft takes care of its own.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So you haven't had the experience that, unfortunately, a few artists have who do outdoor commissions, when the ownership of that land or the business changes, and the new owners question whether they need to keep it or how to keep it or keep it in the same place?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think I'm, by now, at a price range where nobody's going to throw that work away.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] That's true.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: The people that used to own [the piece -UvR] will try to then put it in a place before they leave. And also the other thing that happens is when you do outdoor installations, you actually have a real relationship with that person that owns the piece, a real relationship.

By the time you get through installing it and by the time you get through—they usually know you pretty well, and you know them. Like Aggie Gund has a piece of mine, and of course, how can one not trust somebody like Aggie Gund? She knows about art in a way that she's totally trustworthy.

MS. RICHARDS: Are there relationships with artists that are important to you that we haven't touched on? We talked about that early in your career.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think Judy Pfaff has been important. I'm a great admirer of her work and the adventure with which she thinks and goes through her work. I think she's a real talent. I used to watch her, because for 24 years I was above her in my studio. I used to watch her take a brush and paint on top of things that she made.

And it made me almost salivate. Somehow I knew there would come a day when I would do the same thing. And of course, I have now, with—I use black pigment that I dilute in water that I put over the surfaces of my—

MS. RICHARDS: Are you talking about the graphite?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: —of my work, not the graphite.

MS. RICHARDS: No, black pigment?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I also use paint, black pigment and water, that I put onto my surfaces of the bowls or of my pieces. Actually *Umarfes* has black paint on it that is very, very watered down.

MS. RICHARDS: So that's instead of graphite?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It was called a Kettle Black latex paint. So it's just regular normal paint.

MS. RICHARDS: That's instead of the graphite?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, yes, but maybe—I wouldn't have used graphite or anything else if I didn't use that paint. That's just paint. And the paint has a way of—you can water it down enough, it looks almost like watercolor that you put over. So you can still see the wood, and the wood just drinks quite a lot of it. But there's a real edge between where there is no paint and where the paint begins.

MS. RICHARDS: Anybody else?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I admire Kiki Smith a lot. I haven't mentioned her. I think she's heavily on the side of the emotional and on the side of the psychological and on the side of following the fairy tale.

MS. RICHARDS: Definitely.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think she does it really well. And she idealizes animals in a way that's so tender and, again, that weaves into fairy tales that she fabricates between the relationship of herself and animals.

MS. RICHARDS: Do people get in touch with you, younger artists who are interested in your work? Do you see that it's touching a younger audience, not that there's particular value in them being younger, but—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah, I felt that at the [Storm King] Center show that there were a lot of young people that came to see the show.

MS. RICHARDS: When you've been working as long as you're working, this is a new generation.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It is a new generation, exactly.

[... -UvR]

MS. RICHARDS: And that kind of goes to the question of, do you have time—when you have time, do you have time to go out to galleries?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I do, I do. I'll have to think about that one.

MS. RICHARDS: When you go to galleries and museums, are there certain kinds of work that you're most interested in looking at or following?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I'm not even sure that I can categorize work that I'm more interested in when I go around to galleries. I do know that the older I get, the less tolerance I have of work that I don't like, in a sense that I can walk into a gallery and feel almost immediately whether it's work that I can sort of hang around with or not.

I guess, going back some, I have a great deal of admiration for the work of Joan Mitchell, for the amount of freedom and struggle in her work and the amount of emotional engagement in the youth of her paint. Or, that is, that one feels a very evident love of that paint, and that there's nothing hidden there. It feels as though, even though it makes magic, she still lets you see the process in a way that seems very evident.

MS. RICHARDS: Moving to a slightly different subject, but also thinking about your work, have you taken any steps toward preserving, protecting your legacy, your work after you're gone in any way, whether it's deciding who will be looking after it, advisors, a gallery?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I have been, and I have started a foundation called the von Rydingsvard Greengard Foundation. It was started particularly to—actually, after I die, all of the work goes directly into the foundation. It is not something that I want to burden my daughter with. However, our daughter is wanting very much to head that foundation, which she will.

MS. RICHARDS: Tell me the name of the foundation again.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It's the von Rydingsvard Greengard Foundation. My husband's last name is Greengard—G-R-E-E-N-G-A-R-D.

MS. RICHARDS: And your daughter is Ursula Anna?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Ursula Anne, yeah. Anne, and it's Greeve, G-R-E-E-V-E, von Rydingsvard. Her last name is G-R-E-E-V-E and then she goes by von Rydingsvard.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, okay.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's her last name. She kept the last name, but her husband's name is Greeve, but that's her entire name.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And it's going to be [philanthropist] Ann Hatch—and I trust her judgment, and I just trust her all together. And Annie Greengard is going to be a part of it—Annie Greengard is our granddaughter, who I trust as well. All these people are very smart [...-UVR]. Mary Sabbatino is going to be a consultant.

MS. RICHARDS: So that sounds like you've really got a secure plan, and you don't have to worry about that any more.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't know. [Laughs.] Things change.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, true, but that must be a relief.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: But I'm certainly feeling good about it. So far I'm feeling good about it.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it a difficult process of deciding that?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't think it was difficult to decide. But I do think I need to re-look at it. I think I started this maybe 10 years ago, 12 years ago.

MS. RICHARDS: Really? That long ago?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah, 15 years ago. I forget. But I started it some time ago.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there one particular—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: With, actually, somebody by the name of Ralph Lerner, who is the man that knows art and law like no other person.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there one particular thing—that's pretty early, 12 years ago—that caused you—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It was not an illness, no.

MS. RICHARDS: Just another artist you met who'd done it, and you thought—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, no, no, because I never went to those seminars or whatever they have on foundations. But I just knew I didn't want to burden anybody in the family with that. It's a huge, huge deal.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And they're going to have to be a full-time person that will have to monitor everything, that will have to be sure that if exhibitions happen, that everything gets taken care of properly.

MS. RICHARDS: Absolutely.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: And it won't be any of those people. It will probably be an additionally hired person, and I'm hoping it will be one of my assistants.

MS. RICHARDS: That would be fitting, right.

We talked about some of your travels. Is there any particular trip that we didn't talk about at all, maybe just mentioned, that was really important to you in terms of your development?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I guess the trip that had the major impact is when I went alone to Poland, and I went with Wojciech Krukowski, who then directed the Ujazdowski Castle of Contemporary Art [in Warsaw. He took me through many -UvR] villages to have people sing for me their regional songs. Do you want to mention that? That's the trip we talked about.

MS. RICHARDS: That was the trip that we discussed earlier.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Good, good.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, okay.

Are you thinking about any major trips right now coming up in the future?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No. But I have a feeling they'll be coming.

MS. RICHARDS: So let's go back to talking about your work. And start off with the piece that you did just recently in 2009, *Droga*. I wanted to ask you about that piece. It's a major indoor piece. It kind of relates to the piece you showed me downstairs, actually, that kind of mysterious blobby tubular form on the floor. What does the word "*droga*" mean and—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It means "dear one," referring to a female. The A is the [the ending for a female -UvR].

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. And what were the ideas that you were exploring in that piece when you were making it?

[End of Track.]

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I wanted to make something large that felt alive, but not too alive, that seemed as though it had some possibility of being able to move, but if it did move, it would move very slowly, very deliberately, in keeping with its size. There was an obvious gravitational pull on its skin, because you could feel it by the way the sides joined the floor. And that's the piece that I started with a leftover bowl that I didn't like.

I carved out the center of that bowl, which had hundreds and hundreds of shims pushed into it, and it was also burnt by a disc that's meant only for metal, that when you place it and squeeze it against wood, it burns that wood. It doesn't burn it like fire. It just burns it as smoke coming out, and it makes that area that you're touching with that disc black.

That's the very complex ring [cut out from the center of a bowl -UvR] that I then hung in the air and tilted in a way so that it would force me [... -UvR] to make that kind of movement, which this suspended tilted ring already implied.

It was one of the most complicated pieces to make, because it was one of the first pieces in a long while that I had made using vertical two-by-fours. But they weren't really vertical because as they went back, they would twist and turn very gently to one side. Again, giving that body movement. And there would be sandwiched in there wedges, very deep wedges from the top to the bottom of the body, that would again make these two-by-fours stand up straighter and straighter, because it would be thicker. These wedges would be thicker at the top than at the bottom.

So it would push these boards, as more and more got glued on further back, so it would straighten [the body - UvR] out. So there was this gentle, gentle movement that I wanted—it was extremely important for me to have it in there, just to indicate that it, indeed, was alive.

MS. RICHARDS: It's solid all the way through?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It's all hollow. It's hollow, and it has an outside that's very patterned.

MS. RICHARDS: Most of your pieces are hollow, actually, or have hollow parts.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, yes, except something like *Blackened Word*, which is not hollow. It has—

MS. RICHARDS: Undulations.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, exactly.

MS. RICHARDS: Crenellations.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Exactly.

MS. RICHARDS: Corduroy. [Laughs.]

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Exactly.

MS. RICHARDS: And it has kind of a mysterious aura to it. You said that it's kind of alive.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: That kind of tells that it's kind of not alive.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Exactly, exactly.

MS. RICHARDS: So it kind of looks like it could move in a strange way.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Exactly, exactly.

MS. RICHARDS: We talked about some things in 2010. You did a piece called *Splayed*.

But let's talk about what's going on now in the studio and what you're thinking about for the future. I know I saw lots of pieces.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I did a couple of shovel pieces.

MS. RICHARDS: You have a spoon ladle, right?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: A spoon ladle, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: It was beautiful.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I have that on which I worked on this floppy handle that turned in on itself a good bit. In other words, I changed the top of it a good number of times. But as I did, some of the bottom—because it actually had a hole in the bottom. It was supposed to be a spoon that actually was able to let go of some of what it contains. But it didn't look right, so I plugged it up.

But these shovels—I'm sort of flirting with a second and a third identity for that shovel. Like its shadow form, or its other self, or its skin that's coming off, that's a part of the upper shovel. So in a sense there are two shovels. One is [somewhat -UvR] a mimic of another.

MS. RICHARDS: So that's what I saw, a kind of a reflection or a shadow shovel.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And that's a new element, too, isn't it?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: It is, and so is the fact that it implies that at one point this shovel actually made an impression, as it would in something that was like mud, that it sort of eked itself, that it sucked itself out of.

So the bottom part had an imprint of the shovel having been there, although in time that imprint gets a form that's more generalized than the shovel, simply because it's mud.

And then the other—the sort of in-between form of the shovel can be lighter, and it can be—I don't know. I don't know what it can be or what it is really. But it's—

MS. RICHARDS: So there's a sense of time in there?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I don't know, maybe.

MS. RICHARDS: You're saying it was this, and now it's that. So that's a past and a present.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Maybe. Right, maybe that can be. But maybe it's all—I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: And what kind of pieces—you mentioned and I stopped you. Earlier you were talking about a couple of pieces you're working on now for the future.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I'm doing something now that one will be able to walk into, and it feels almost like a large, softish egg that's attached to something that—do you want to put that off for a moment?

[Audio break.]

So it's a piece that's very organic, and I think I started with something in mind that was related to *Damski Czepek*. But I think I'm going to change the top part.

MS. RICHARDS: *Damski Czepek* is the piece that was made of resin for Madison Square Park.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Made of resin, that's right. And I'm hoping, if I can get the funding, that this can be translated into a urethane piece, because it would make more sense to be able to walk into something that was translucent, through which the sun could come.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you imagine when you did *Damski Czepek*, or maybe this piece, that you had the option to color the urethane? I don't know if you did.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you color it?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: So that's—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I mean I didn't paint it.

MS. RICHARDS: No, I mean in the urethane.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: In the urethane, exactly. I took a trip out [to Walla Walla Foundry in Washington -UvR] and just colored it.

MS. RICHARDS: So that would have a kind of a bluish—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, that's right.

MS. RICHARDS: And when you think of this next piece, is that still the color you're imagining?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think so, although I'm going to rethink it after I make it. I might not want that. I might want something else.

MS. RICHARDS: After you make the wood?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: After I make the wood, exactly.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you say you're doing this hoping to get the funding, it means you're going to bring it up to as far as it can go in wood?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I'm going to build the whole thing in wood.

MS. RICHARDS: But your intention in this moment is that that's not going to be the piece, that it's going to be then—

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Correct.

MS. RICHARDS: —made in urethane.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Correct.

MS. RICHARDS: And that's something that you and your assistants and maybe the gallery, too, will be pursuing.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Oh, my assistants don't do any of that. They just help me.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, the gallery, okay. So the gallery will be pursuing the possibilities.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yeah, yeah. They're going to freak out because it's going to be way more money than can be spent. I'm just hoping upon hope that something will come up that will enable me.

MS. RICHARDS: If they helped you with this, then, of course, they would get the money back once they sold it.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Correct.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that an arrangement you're comfortable with?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Of course, I'm comfortable with it. But we don't know about the selling end.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Every time a large piece gets sold, it's like a miracle.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] You said you had this dream of a piece that you might want to do, but you said it couldn't be done in Yorkshire. Are there any other dream projects or semi-feasible projects that you want to do that you haven't done yet?

[Audio break.]

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: There's a park in Warsaw named Łazienki [Park].

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell that?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's directly—Ł-A-Z-I-E-N-K-I. It's a beautiful park, and it has a series of rectangular pools that are in the ground with water in them. And you can see from—there's a staircase that's in the back of the Ujazdowski Zamek, which is the Ujazdowski Contemporary Art museum that, actually, the Pope did Mass from, because so many people could congregate around those high stairs and they could all see him.

And I have a proposal, actually, or a kind of dream, that there would be a bowl that would be a huge version of *Ocean Floor*, without the sacks hanging on the side, that would reflect in probably two of the pools.

MS. RICHARDS: What do you mean "reflect in"?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, that they would be close enough. In other words, these rectangular pools are

close enough to one another that if my piece were placed between the first two, it would reflect.

MS. RICHARDS: That's on the ground?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: That's on the ground. It would reflect in, certainly, one of the pools, depending on where you were standing looking down. And you could also, obviously, see the piece itself, the bowl itself.

MS. RICHARDS: Is this actually something you could propose?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: No, it's not going to happen. Well, yes, but it never happened.

MS. RICHARDS: It's something that if someone could fund it, you would do.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes, or could fund it, or if they allowed it or wanted it.

MS. RICHARDS: I see. Have they commissioned any other contemporary artists to do works in that area?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think that they have very serious things, like the huge statue of Chopin and other big deals.

MS. RICHARDS: Historically.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Figurative big deals, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Polish historical figures, I see.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: So I don't know what they would think of a bowl.

MS. RICHARDS: So this would be a new initiative for them totally.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Yes. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: What would you say are your most pressing—you maybe have said this already—current issues and concerns in your work, not troubles, but artistic issues and concerns?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I guess I want very, very much to evolve. And again, I don't know what that means. I want very much to do more adventures with the work, but I don't know what that means. I'd like to try other materials.

MS. RICHARDS: For example?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Well, maybe more work with copper, more work with lead. Lead is a soft metal that's malleable. And maybe more work with plastics, maybe more work with fiberglass—not fiberglass itself but—you want to put that off?

[Audio break.]

So we shall see. In other words, I don't want to think too heavily that I understand my goals so clearly. But I do want to feel as though—

[Audio break.]

MS. RICHARDS: A kind of related question to what you're interested in, you said exploring new materials, and basically feeling that you're always plowing new ground—a metaphor.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MS. RICHARDS: What would you say is your greatest challenge at this point, in terms of something you have to work against—either philosophically, practically, or in terms of the feelings and the psychic energy you bring to the work—what are the challenges?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think on a pragmatic level, because my work is physically so demanding, I just want to know that my body can continue to do the work. So I think I'm just going to pay more attention to it, in the sense of doing things that will enable me to continue to use my body the way that I've been using it.

And I think, certainly for now, that that seems to be in fairly decent form. But I think even more importantly is to reach out to things that I don't know so well. As it is, I think I've amassed 35 years of knowing how to work with cedar. And it's not even another material. That's not the answer to anything really.

It's reaching out, maybe, in another way, be it another material, be it the same material, yet still using what you've amassed, yet still holding on to a kind of wisdom. And again, I think that it might be a presentation of something that doesn't seem clear enough to really be functional.

But I think that there is a will and a want in me to—not just continue to explore, but hopefully to explore in a way that would bear fruit that really felt interesting to me. It's not as though I haven't in the past, but I want to not only continue it, but I want to make it even more compelling. Again, as soon as I say that, I don't really know what I mean, but there is an intention there, and that's all I can say.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Is there anything else you'd like to add before we end?

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: I think we covered things well.

MS. RICHARDS: Good, me too. [Laughs.] Thank you.

MS. VON RYDINGSVARD: You're welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]